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MRS. CURGENVEN
OF CURGENVEN

VOL. II.

MRS. CURGENVEN

OF CURGENVEN

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

Methuen & Co.

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CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	ALICE	1
II.	TOLMENNA	13
III.	A REBELLION	27
IV.	WANTED; AN ADDRESS	39
V.	THE GHOST OF A WILL	50
VI.	THE FOURTEENTH	62
VII.	IN THE SCHOOL-ROOM	72
VIII.	A BROKEN BREAKFAST	84
IX.	A SECOND DISAPPOINTMENT	96
X.	A RUINED HOME	108
XI.	TAKE CARE!	119
XII.	A FATHER'S HEART	132
XIII.	A MENACED HOME	144
XIV.	PAX ALL ROUND	156
XV.	IN THE OFFICE	168
XVI.	AN ENCOUNTER	183
XVII.	INVENI PORTUM	197
XVIII.	CIVILIZATION AND SAVAGERY	208
XIX.	TRYING THE PISTOL	221

MRS. CURGENVEN.

CHAPTER I.

ALICE.

JUSTINIAN CURGENVEN experienced none of those vexations, in taking possession of the Curgenven estate, that marred the satisfaction of his father. He was not called upon for subscriptions, nor harassed for repairs. No one wanted him to speak at political meetings, and take the chair at missionary gatherings. He was as much courted as a prince, and felt all his consequence as heir-apparent to the principality of Curgenven. Justinian had never thought disparagingly of himself, and now he was inclined to consider himself very highly indeed. He tossed his head, walked erect, was a little more careful about his dress—not to run about with his boot-strings untied, nor out-at-elbows. He cocked his cap consequentially, and stalked in the middle of the road. For the

first few days Justinian was perfectly happy, as there was novelty in the situation, and variety in the objects presented to his eyes. What formerly he had looked at with curiosity, but had never been suffered to touch by Mrs. Curgenven, he now handled freely. Portions of the house to which he had never been invited he explored at will. But after a few days he began to feel bored. He had not fitted into the new surroundings so as to feel comfortable in them. He lounged in a chair and yawned. He pulled down book after book in the library, and found them alike old dull stuff. He gravitated to his father, his wonted companion, and found his father's time taken up with business. The hilarity and offhan edness of Mr. Percival were gone; he was fagged, vexed, uneasy, and the boy's humour took the same tinge of discouragement. Curgenven was large and splendid, but the Pill-box was cosy. 'After all,' thought Mr. Percival, 'on my hundred and fifty I was jollier in the Pill-box.' Justinian had not reached this depth of repining, but he began to admit that he regretted the free-and-easy, slouching, sufficient-unto-the-day life in the Pill-box.

Unkind to Justinian Mrs. Curgenven had never been. She had felt interest in the boy, and regret that his education had been neglected. She had spoken to his father on this matter. Mr. Percival readily admitted that Justinian had

not been kept to his books, nor taught submission to control. But this admission led to no results. Percival did not fret himself over his son's deficiencies, and he took no active steps to rectify what he knew was amiss.

Mrs. Curgenven had never liked Percival, but she had never quarrelled with him. She was a woman of strict views as to the conduct of life, and her own ways were orderly in accordance with her principles. The easy indifference of Percival offended her. In her opinion, he exaggerated into defects the weaknesses of her husband. Lambert, if left to her, might have been kept in order, but he broke away from restraint and relapsed under the influence of his cousin. She had not openly discouraged the visits of Percival to Curgenven, but she had received him without warmth when he came, and had expressed no wish to see him again when he left. Her manner towards him had been civil and distant.

Now that Percival was squire of Curgenven Jane kept aloof, partly, perhaps, because it would be painful to her to revisit her former home, where she had been happy; yet Mrs. Curgenven was not the woman to consider her own feelings; the main reason for her abstention was that the negative feeling towards Percival she had entertained in the past was converted into positive aversion since he let her understand that he believed in the marriage of Lambert with Theresa,

and that consequently her own position had been equivocal. She resolutely set her face against all inquiry into this matter, as she would have set it against an investigation into the authenticity of the Pentateuch, or into the legitimacy of the authority of the Crown.

When she met Mr. Percival, as she needs must, it was with the same tolerant condescension with which she would have conversed with a Dissenting grocer or a Radical plumber. Percival, by admitting the possibility of a doubt as to her position being morally and legally unassailable, had fallen from that sublime sphere in which she moved, and in which were her convictions. She could stoop to speak with those who belonged to an inferior order of beings, but such converse must be carried on upon conditions. Of these there were two —either the member of that inferior order must be carried up in a brief ecstatic trance into her seventh heaven, there to be dazzled by her transcendent glory ; or she must herself descend, and be recognized as graciously descending, also for a brief space, to be a prophet of the truth and angel of revelation to those below.

With Alice, Justinian had been on excellent terms. She was a bright, charming girl, oppressed by her mother, and effervescing with happiness when the pressure was for a while removed. She was delighted to associate with a cousin of about

her own age, as she had no companions in the neighbourhood for whom she cared greatly. The independence of Justinian, his self-confidence, his unflagging good-humour, affected her girlish imagination. She was disposed, in rebellious moods, to dispute the reiterated assertion of her mother that the young fellow was uneducated and ignorant as a boor. She admired his readiness of resource, his experimental knowledge of the world and of men, rare in a youth. But, indeed, Justinian's years had been passed in scenes various, and among many strange persons; he was intelligent, he had observed much, and had acquired much from his father's conversation—and his father had knocked about over all the quarters of the globe.

Among the many methods adopted for stunting the intelligence by the directors of education is that of teaching geography by rote. Alice had been required to learn that of the United States in the approved manner. She had acquired a list of cities, states, rivers, mountains, the population of the towns, the altitude of the mountains, and the amount of cubic feet of water rolled down by the rivers. Her head had been stuffed with these solid and uninteresting facts, which happily a healthy and vigorous nature enables children so taught to reject immediately after their examination—as healthy and vigorous stomachs reject unwholesome, indigestible food.

But Justinian had been in the 'States.' He had tarried more or less briefly in several of the towns, could describe them, could tell some incident that had befallen him or his father in them. At once the girl became interested, looked these places out on the map, and never after forgot them or their position. The Cape, New Zealand, China—Mr. Percival Curgenven had been everywhere, and had had droll experiences everywhere, all which had been retailed to his son, and his son retailed them to Alice, who laughed and identified these localities thenceforth.

It was wonderful to her how readily Justinian could calculate, by ways of his own, in his head, and reach a result quicker and with more correctness than could she by rule on the slate.

In a knowledge of history Justinian was deficient. But one rainy day, when he and his father were staying at Curgenven, he had asked Alice to tell him what she knew about the family portraits. Unhappily the traditions had been broken by the transfer of the estate from the old squire to Captain Lambert, so that what she knew she derived partly from stories her father remembered to have been told when he was a child, but chiefly from her mother, who, with somewhat pedantic precision, had remembered what had been told her by Squire Justinian in past days relative to the ancient Curgenvens.

The young Justinian had a tolerably high opinion of his family, and was interested to hear about its past. But he became greatly confused in the history—he could not tell the order in which the English kings came, and was sensible of a little shame when Alice caught him out in an egregious chronological blunder.

'The first portrait we have,' said she, 'is of a Ralph Curgenven in the reign of James I.'

'Yes,' said Justinian, 'I must read up that reign. Of course he did great things in it—fought in the Crusades, no doubt.'

'How can you say such things, Justin? There had been no Crusades since 1270—that under Saint Louis, in which he died at Carthage. James I. of England and VI. of Scotland came to the throne in 1603 and died in 1625.'

'To be sure,' said Justinian abashed. 'But there were Curgenvens before that.'

'Oh, there were Curgenvens of Curgenven before the Conquest!'

'I must read up the Conquest. No doubt they were most important people, and there is lots about them in history.'

'There were Curgenvens before the Heptarchy,' said Alice; 'there must have been—the name is British.'

'I'll grind away at the Heptarchy,' said Justinian.

'I really don't know when there were not Curgenvens,' said Alice.

'I say, lend us your Universal History. I'll have a good sweat at it, and then I shall know exactly where all the Curgenvens come.'

Thus, unconsciously, the two minds acted on each other, each opening the other to new interests. Alice exerted a softening and refining influence on Justinian, whose home was without a woman in it; and to Alice association with her cousin saved her mind from the paralyzing effect of her mother's unremittent drill.

Since his arrival along with his father at the Manor-House Justinian had seen little of his cousin. He had been too much engaged in exploring the house and the stables and gardens to give her a thought. Mrs. Curgenven had not been to the house, and he had not been to the rectory.

At last, believing he had run through the gamut of the novelties, and becoming weary of having nothing to do, with his hands in his pockets Justinian sauntered to the stables—that place to which every idle boy gravitates instinctively. His father was out—the coachman had driven him into Liskeard—so that he knew he would not find him there, but he expected to find the groom, with his coat off and braces relaxed and cast

down, sleeves turned up, currycombing a horse or washing a carriage.

No one, however, was in the stable-yard, and Justinian strolled into the stables, and there heard a gentle voice speaking in terms of endearment to a grey pony in the loose-box. Justinian knew the voice at once, and his heart gave a leap. Alice was in the loose-box, coaxing her favourite riding cob, Whinny, and the young fellow went to her at once. If the truth must be told, his delight at hearing her sprang from selfishness. He desired to have some one to talk to, and some variety to the wearisome exploration of the contents of the house.

He found Alice with her arms round the neck of the grey, caressing the beast, with her cheek laid against the head of Whinny, who was content to be fondled by her mistress.

When Justinian entered the loose-box Alice looked up; her eyes were moist. She coloured slightly, tossed back her hair from her face, and said apologetically, 'I ventured here to say good-bye to Whinny.'

'Why say good-bye?'

'Because Whinny is no longer mine. She belongs to you now—so mamma says.'

'Oh, stuff! She has always been yours, Alice. Of course she remains yours.'

'But you will want a cob.'

'Not such a cob as that,' said the boy disdainfully. 'I want a creature fourteen and a half hands high, and with more spirit than the old grey.'

'Thank you, Justin, but I don't fancy we can afford to keep her now.'

'Rubbish! Of course you can. I will keep her here for you if your mother makes any demur. She is always at your service, she is yours, not mine; and as for the bit of grass she eats, and the oats—who thinks any odds of that?'

'You are a good, kind cousin,' said Alice, putting out her hand to him over the back of the cob; 'I shall always feel thankful to you. I didn't want my darling pet to get into bad hands. You will see to that. As to my keeping Whinny, that must be as mamma and grandpapa think. You know grandpapa has a mission woman and a Scripture reader, and so can't also keep a pair. He says if he could do with one only then he might have a second horse, but people might object, and so he is obliged to do with one horse to hack at everything. Perhaps,' considered Alice, 'if he could have a mission child, a ministering angel, that wouldn't cost more than half, then he might allow me to keep a pony. You see the Scripture reader has to deliver tracts, and the cost of the tracts adds to the expense.'

'Come along, Alice,' said Justinian, 'let us go for a ride on the moors. I'm so dull and stupid at the Manor, and papa is away, gone to see old Physic, so I have no one to talk to, and away from the Pill-box, nothing to do.'

'I shall be delighted. Mamma is about collecting pennies from the old women for Anglo-Israel. She says that the subscriptions have got behind since dear papa's death. She could not attend to them for a quarter. But what are you going to ride?'

'My horse has not come yet. Pike is going to get me a beauty, one that will turn over a stone wall without blinking. You ride and I will run by your side. I'll saddle Whinny for you. Never mind the groom.'

All Justinian's good spirits had returned; he laughed and chattered, as he walked beside Alice mounted on her cob. They went out through the gates that led from the grounds and the birch-woods upon the furzy moor. The land rose rapidly, consequently there was no question of Alice putting her pony to the trot and of Justinian running. At her side he kept looking up into her bright face, and making her laugh with his odd sallies.

The fresh air blowing over the moors fluttered Alice's hair about her face, and made her cheeks glow and her eyes sparkle.

'I say, cousin,' said Justinian, 'this is jolly; now I am at the Manor, we shall go about together and see all that is to be seen on the moors.' Then it flashed on him that he had spoken unfeelingly, not considering her loss in the thought of his gain. He became red and confused: 'You know what I mean, Alice, I'm not such a cad as to mean anything that may give you pain. All I want to say is, that I'm awfully glad we are near each other now instead of being as before, nine miles apart.'

'I am quite sure you never intended to say, never thought even, anything but what was kind and courteous.'

'I say, Alice, by George, who is that?'

They had reached a broad sweep of fairly level down, and over this was galloping a girl on the back of a wild moorland pony, without saddle or bridle, astride, directing her horse by a halter, and with shouts. Her hat had fallen between her shoulders and her red hair was flying about her head. She was directing her pony to leap the gorse bushes, and thread its way at a canter among masses of dispersed granite.

'That——?' said Alice. 'Oh, Esther!'

It could be none other.

'To be sure. I thought I had seen her before somewhere.'

CHAPTER II.

TOLMENNA.

No sooner did Esther Morideg catch sight of Justinian and Alice Curgenven, than she turned the head of her horse, lashed it with a bunch of furze she held in her left hand, and came plunging toward them over all obstacles, at headlong speed, in a manner impossible with any steed not reared on the rugged granite moors. When she reached them she drew up.

'What are you doing here? Why are you come to the moor?' she asked.

'Esther,' answered Alice, 'may we not visit your kingdom without a passport?'

'I don't know what you mean.'

'I am coming on your own invitation,' said Justinian, 'to see your house and make the acquaintance of your grandfather.'

'Our house you can see, as long as it is ours,' answered the

girl, leaping from the back of the horse, withdrawing the halter, and with a cut of the furze bush dismissing the creature from bondage, as an ancient Roman manumitted a slave. 'But gran'fer, he's in prison and don't come out till the end o' the week.'

'In prison!' repeated Justinian.

'Yes,' said the girl, striding along by the side of the boy. 'And I reckon he'll go there ag'in afore long for sum'at better nor last time.'

'What has he done?'

'Oh!' said Esther, putting her hands behind her head, twisting her red gold hair into a knot, then stooping and rending sprigs of heather, and pinning up her locks with them. 'Oh, it's all along o' Lawyer Physic. Gran'fer he knocked 'n down, he did.'

'Why, what had Mr. Physic done?'

'Done—iverything what he oughtn't to ha' done, sure.'

She turned and looked full in Justinian's face. 'I'd like to have thickey fuzz-bush i' my hand, and beat old Physic wi' it, I would, and for sure I wad'n spare him. I'd cut him over the back and right across the face.'

'But what is this all about?'

'It's all about Tolmenna. About what else shu'd it be?'

'Is that your house?'

'Yes, it be—sartain sure, if us can keep it. But Lawyer Physic he sez, sez he, he's gone and bought the land, and is a-going to hev a mine there. I know th' ou'd volks were arter tin hereabout, ages agone. I know it—there be their works, and the pixies' hammers you can hear now i' the adits, and where you hear the pixies at work, there for sartain be a lode.'

'He has bought the land, do you say?'

'I believe the matter stands thus,' said Alice. 'Mr. Physic has purchased some of this moorland, and wants to get up a company to work the tin on it. He has given Roger Morideg notice to quit his cottage.'

'And he's not going to quit,' said Esther, savagely stamping on the short turf. 'Gran'fer, his vayther, he built the house, and gran'fer were a little boy at the time and helped 'n to roll the stones and cut the faran' (fern) 'for the thatch.'

'Then you think the house belongs to you?'

'For sure sartain. Gran'fer's vayther he built 'n. Don't that mak' it his?'

'Not unless the land were his on which he built it.'

'Oh, the land!' said Esther impatiently; 'gran'fer's paid a shillin' every Lady' (day) 'for that, an' he don't deny he'll go on paying—he's never got hindermost i' his paying.'

'Then, Esther,' said Justinian, 'I am sorry for you, but as

far as I can see you have no redress. However, I will speak to my father about it—he has, of course, great influence with Mr. Physic—and he will see whether he can prevail on him not to press you to quit.'

'Us won't quit. Us'll stick there like moss to the stoans.'

'But what has that to do with your grandfather's being in prison?' asked the boy.

'Why, gran'fer knocked Lawyer Physic down, when he came to say he'd turn 'n out, and hav' th' ou'd house down.'

'He had no right to lay his hands on him.'

'He didn't, he knocked 'n down wi' a stone; a stone I reckon bean't so soft as is a hand.'

'I am afraid this will create a prejudice against him.'

'He'll knock 'n down wi' sum'at harder nor a stone if he comes here again; and if gran'fer don't, I will.'

'I'll tell you what I will do,' said Alice, 'I'll get my grandfather, the rector, to interfere.'

'I don't want he,' retorted Esther somewhat contemptuously. 'I know very well what he'll do. He'll go and give six very good reasons for Roger be in his right, and then he'll turn about and give half-a-dozen why Lawyer Physic be all i' his right; and then he'll go away thinking he's a peacemaker and the blessing on peacemakers be his—and he's left the muddle jist where he found it, not a bit and crumb better.

But, there, I niver meant to say nothing to cross you, Miss Alice, us be too good friends for that. Gran'mother sez as some volks be good granite and some volks be elvan, and some be tin.'

'What is elvan?' asked Justinian.

'Elvan! I thought every fool knowed that. Elvan be a sort o' stone as is no good at all, goes to powder, but where elvan be there be tin, for sure sartain. You can't do nothing wi' elvan; 'tain't builder's stone, 'tain't metal, but it be between the two, and no good for naught but to say that where it be, there be tin. I reckon Pass'n Pamphlet be elvan. If you want to find this or that, you mun look o' one side o' him or t'other.'

'Well, never mind about my grandfather,' said Alice, somewhat annoyed, but also not a little amused, for children and the ignorant take the measure of a man and discover his weaknesses with marvellous acuteness; 'what is to be done with regard to Tolmenna?'

'Knock Lawyer Physic on the head,' said Esther with confidence, 'and do't better next time than did gran'fer wi' a stone. I reckon,' she added with a laugh, 'he knocked 'n wi' a bit o' elvan by mistake.'

'You should not harbour such thoughts, Esther,' said Alice gravely.

'Why not? He'd turn us out o' our house as gran'fer and his ou'd vayther builded, and where I've a lived a' my life, and I love every stone o' it—every stone as he'd tear down.' Then defiantly, 'I don't care if I do it. Nobody never would catch me and put me i' prison. I could run and hide. I know these moors, and there's scores and scores o' places for hiding. Why, looky' here.'

She pointed. They had reached a depression in the surface of the moor between two eminences, there were heaps and hollows in a line from the highest point to the bottom of the valley. 'See! all this the ou'd volks ha' streamed for tin, and they've made their adits and their levels, and it's a reg'lar rabbit-burrow to them as knows it.'

The moor was furrowed as though it had at one time been subject to the rush of furious torrents at the melting of masses of snow. This was now all, or nearly all, clothed with scanty turf and dense grey moss, and the stones were so belichened as to assimilate with the moss in one tone of silvery grey.

'Look here,' said Esther. 'I know well what the old men did. First they grubbed the elvan after tin as far as they could down wi'out going underground. Do'y see now where their works be? Well, then they got a bit boulder, and they sunk prospectin' pits. Thickey there be one.' She pointed to a hollow like a pock-mark in the face of the moor, but

with a grass-covered heap thrown up on the lower side of it. 'They dug down there, till they hit a lode, and then they went bouldly on after it for a way, and then they got feared, they was too long i' the dark, and up they worked to the light again. Look! There's one of the places they came up at. There's most o' these here prospectin' holes be choked up wi' rummage. But there be some as I knows as bean't. I can go down 'n and run along underground—like a rabbit or a rat, and nobody could niver find me—and come up just when I'd a mind to.'

In another moment the house was reached. It was a low one-storey erection of the rudest description ; great granite unshaped blocks piled one on another, bedded in clay and moss ; no mortar had been used. The walls were thick—six feet, rudely faced outward and inward, and filled in with rubble in the middle. A brush of whitewash had been given to the door-jambs, and to the window-frames. The roof was thatched with ferns only, or ferns and turf together, and was nearly as thick as the walls ; it was supported on massive oak rafters. A high wall or hedge of stones enclosed a space before the cottage, cutting off all prospect and excluding much sun ; but such walls were erected to screen the fronts of houses from wind and rain, as well as to protect them from invasion by the half-wild horses and cattle that roamed the moors, and which,

in stormy weather, or out of wanton curiosity, unless kept at a distance, would drive their heads through windows, and thrust themselves wholly in at doors.

The cottage interior was gloomy; the entrance was not immediately into the sitting-room, but into a sort of stable occupied by poultry, a cow, a rude cart, and a number of old barrels and more or less fragmentary articles of husbandry. A side door by a granite step admitted to the kitchen-chamber. In this room there was a ceiling of boards, and below the boards the entire surface was ribbed with rods, extending the width of the apartment, fastened to the rafters, and this rack that occupied the superficies constituted the wardrobe, store-closet, and treasury of the household. Guns, tools, garments, boots, shoes, groceries, were immediately overhead, reached readily by the hand, as the room was but six feet high. No drier or more accessible spot could have been desired, and such contrivances were general on the moors till of late years. In the moist atmosphere goods thus held aloft overhead were kept from moth and mildew, and became impregnated with peat smoke, that gave them a peculiar colour and savour.

On entering the room, which was unoccupied, Justinian and Alice could at first discern little after having been out in the full glare of day. But by degrees their eyes became accustomed to the dusk, and then Justinian exclaimed, as he

pointed to a line hanging by the great fire-place, into which feathers were knotted, 'Why, what in the name of wonder is this?'

Esther went up to the line. It was composed of black wool, white and brown thread entwined, and at every two or three inches was looped about a bunch of cock's or pheasant's or moorhen's feathers, set alternately. The line had been fastened to the rail overhead, and a low stool was at the hearthstone below it; the plaiter of the chain was away, and the web was incomplete. Esther laughed.

'This be a witch-ladder,' she said. 'Gran'mother be a making on't. Her don't hold wi' gran'fer's ways, knocking volk about the head wi' a stone. Her say, "Leave it to me, and I'll finish 'em my way." I reckon thickey witch-ladder be a-made for Lawyer Physic.'

'And what will Lawyer Physic do with it when he gets it?' asked the boy.

'He'll never get it, but it'll get him,' answered Esther. 'Do'y mean to tell me you don't know what a witch-ladder be? Lor'-a-mussy—what be the good o' schules when it leaves scholards so tottle ignorant? I'll telly what it be. Her hev' wove and knotted into thickey ladder every ill her can mention. There be every kind o' pains and aches in they knots and they feathers; and when gran'mother hev' done the ladder

her'll tie a stone to the end and sink it i' Dosmare Pool, and ivery ill wish ull find a way, one after the other, to the j'ints and bones, and head and limbs, o' Lawyer Physic. See if they don't.'

'Oh, Esther!' exclaimed Alice, shocked at what she heard. 'This is as wicked as it is to strike Mr. Physic with a stone.'

'Why is it?' asked the girl defiantly. 'He's got his money and his law, and the perlice to do for him what he likes, and what hev' we poor folks got? I reckon us must help ourselves as best us can, if not wi' moor-stones, then wi' ill wishes tied into witch-ladders.'

'It is ridiculous,' said Justinian. 'I shouldn't mind any number of witch-ladders being woven for me, but I would be spared the cobble-stones.'

'You shall have neither on 'em, never,' exclaimed Esther; 'never naught but good wishes and kind will—there, I swear that, my young squire.' She laid hold of him with both her hands and shook him in a friendly mood.

'But really, Esther,' persisted the young fellow, 'I cannot understand any human being who pretends to have reason believing in such rubbish.'

'You say that—you!' exclaimed the girl, again shaking him, but in a less friendly manner. 'What 'ud you be if gran'mother hadn't a-turned her apron?'

Justinian liberated himself, and burst into laughter.

'Aye!' said Esther, somewhat angrily, 'you may laugh, but it be true as daylight. Gran'mother were angered wi' Mrs. Curgenven, and her shooked off her good luck from her and turned all her luck backsyforemost. And from that hour everything hev' gone again' her. The lady be cast out of the house, has lost her husband, and you and your father be in her place. My gran'mother did that. Ask Mrs. Curgenven—ask Miss Alice if it weren't so.' Then, conscious that she had struck on a painful subject, she added, 'See what an ill thing it be, when the good luck be turned off one it be turned off from others as well. Gran'mother niver meant no harm by you, Miss Alice, niver; but when her tooked the good days away from your mother, her couldn't do other but take the sunlight away from you too; but I'll make all well to once if I can.'

Justinian was conscious that the change in the fortunes of Alice and her mother was an unpleasant topic—must be distressing for his cousin to hear commented on, and he endeavoured to divert the thoughts of Esther once more to the ladder.

'Now, Esther, can you, as a rational being, look me in the face, and say that you believe in such stuff as this lot of twist and feathers doing any one harm?'

'Aye, I can,' replied the girl with assurance, and she fixed

her large brown lustrous eyes on his. 'It's in reason. Don't gran'mother knot an ill wish into every loop her make wi' the veathers? And don't the threefold cord hold 'em together? And where else be they if they bain't there? Then when the ladder be down i' Dosmare Pool, as the water unlooses and rots the ties, up comes the wishes, one after the other, and away they goes right on end to Lawyer Physic. I've a-zeed un comin' up scores o' times. You can zee 'em yourself. Go to Dosmare Pool and look into the water, and you'll zee there'll come up a soort o' bubble, and when her gets to the top her's gone—them is the ill wishes other volks ha' tied in the witch-ladders they've let down there. And when gran'-mother ha' done her'n and let'n down, you'll see her wishes, as the knots loose, come up just the same way.'

Justinian was provoked at the ignorance and superstition of the girl, but he let her speak on that she might not recur to the former topic. However, she went back to it nevertheless, for she said, 'But that's naught to do wi' the ill luck gran'-mother sent to Mrs. Curgenven, and that has come on her heavier nor ever gran'mother minded it should. But as it canna be ondone what ha' happ'd, see if I canna make better for what is to come. Do'y know why this house be called Tolmenna?—no, I reckon not; but I've heard gran'fer say that in the old Cornish tongue it mean'd the Great Stone wi'

a hole through 'n, and sure enough there her be in the linney. You go round,' she said to Justinian, 'by the outzide till tha come to the great stone set up on end in the wall. You'll zee the hole sure enough, but her's stopped wi' a whisp o' hay. I'll pull 'n out.'

Justinian left the house as directed.

The stone in question was easily found; it stood up, a slab of granite some nine feet high and eight or nine wide, and in it, about three feet above the soil, a circular hole had been artificially but rudely cut through it.

Esther had brought Alice into the outbuilding that served as ante-chamber to the house proper, and going to the back drew away a wad of hay, and the light and air poured in through the orifice.

'Now,' said the girl to Justinian, who stood without, 'thrust in your hand.'

He put his arm through, as commanded.

'And you, Miss Alice, take the young squire's hand.'

Alice, much amused, and to humour the wild girl, did as she was bidden.

Then Esther, tearing open her collar, drew from her neck a coral chain over her head, and she wound it about their united hands.

'I've heard gran'mother say,' she said, standing by their

bound hands, 'as in the ou'd ancient time the volk used to do this and was married thereby fast as heaven and airth cu'd make 'em. And I've made you double fast, I have, wi' my pixy chain. You're one afore heaven above and airth beneath, and a' the pixies as well, so I've mended what was amiss, and you'll get back again to Curgenven, and get the young squire too.'

Then suddenly, moved by a new impulse, she withdrew the chain and ran away—ran from the cottage, fled among the rocks, threw herself down in a hidden nook, and tossed from side to side in a storm of tears.

CHAPTER III.

A REBELLION.

Mr. Percival Curgenven sat in the study. A good many houses have rooms so designated, though never used for that concentration of thought which is implied by the name. Captain Lambert had preferred his smoking-room in the bungalow as a quiet retreat to which he could retire, and where he could lounge and enjoy his cigar, and let his thoughts drift to and fro as sea-weed in chopping waves in a vortex of currents. All business he had thrown off himself upon the shoulders of agent and wife. Now Mr. Percival had discovered that much came upon him, the consideration of which he was not in a position to devolve on others. And chief of this was that day-and-night-mare of all housekeepers, the servants.

Percival had thought that he was freed from solicitude on this head when he constituted his faithful old factotum at the

Pill-box, Bathsheba Trefry, housekeeper in Curgenven. She was severely conscientious, grim, but good-natured towards children and animals. In the Pill-box she had not been brought into relation with other servants, as the only assistant kept there was a temporary charwoman. She had acted as Percival's housekeeper, cook, parlour- and chamber-maid at Liskeard, and must accordingly know the several duties appertaining to these separate offices. None could therefore be better calculated to superintend the several servants who would relieve her of these duties. She was a strict woman, and would be able to keep the younger servants in order. But the domestics whom Percival found in the house, and whom he, ignorant and inexperienced in such matters, had engaged to remain on, rose in revolt. Mrs. Bounce, the cook, Mr. Tombs, the butler, Charles, the fair and feeble footman, Mary Jane, the upper housemaid, and Rose-Anne, the under-housemaid, and Thomas, the boot-and-shoe boy, were indignant and resolved not to endure this elevation over their heads of 'an old frump,' and the cook told Mrs. Trefry as much in forcible terms, not sparing her the frumpish designation. Bathsheba appealed to her master, and Mr. Percival, in sanguine spirit, sent for the cook into his study, believing that a word from him would oil and allay the troubled waters. But he was doomed to discover that such domestic storms are not

to be appeased by a drop of good advice ; that the interference of the master works the storm into a hurricane.

Mrs. Bounce, who appeared red in the face and puffing, had assumed an air of defiance before she entered the study, and had fortified her resolution to brave the master by that means to which cooks are supposed not infrequently to have recourse.

She listened with lack-lustre eye and pursed-up lips to what Mr. Percival had to say, and then, suddenly, the torrent of her words poured forth. She commented on the ridiculous figure Mrs. Trefry cut with her antiquated dress, on her manner of doing up her hair, on her sniffing, on the tone of her voice and the texture of her skin, on the baseness of her character in having served for twelve pounds—in an incautious moment Bathsheba had let out this damning fact—on the gross and unpardonable insult offered to herself, a lady who condescended for forty pounds to see that the kitchen-maid did all her dirty work, in having pitchforked above her a person, a creature, who had served as maid-of-all-work on twelve pounds. Mrs. Bounce would tell Mr. Curgenven what she thought of Mrs. Trefry, how she was disposed to designate her—she was an old frump, and when that was said she had said all. Nevertheless Mrs. Bounce did not show that she had said all when she had employed that expletive. That

woman had 'the imperence to give herself hairs over her, a woman as knowed nothing of what a gentleman's cook ought to be.'

Mr. Curgenven had sprung up, unable to endure further the rush of the cook's words; he caught her by the shoulders, spun her round, and thrust her through the study door. Mrs. Bounce was not silenced by this means; she raised her voice to a higher pitch, she shouted in the hall, on the stairs: 'As how *she* had been accustomed to be in gentlemen's establishments, and she wouldn't demean herself by staying another hour in an 'ouse where there was a master as didn't know how to be'ave himself to ladies, who was bringing in all the rag and bobtail acquaintance of his beggar days to fill the place of respectable servants. She knowed, she did, 'ow as Mr. Percival 'ad 'eld his 'at for the twopences the captain 'ad chucked to him. She knowed as he 'ad 'ad nothing to live on but what the captain 'ad given 'im. She snapped her fingers in his face, and when she'd got 'er wages, she'd go off direct, and never trouble 'im for a char-acter,' and so on and so on.

Mr. Curgenven rang the bell.

The butler entered.

'Send for the policeman to remove that woman,' said Percival, fuming with rage.

Instead of replying, the butler shut the door behind him,

assumed an unbutlerian expression of face, and said, 'I beg your pardon, sir, but I want to know if I shall forfeit a month's wages if I go at once, or whether I shall be forced to remain my four weeks, which 'ud be unpleasant to all parties. I'd rayther go, sir, with my wage in my pocket than stay and break the decanter, and run my helbow through the plate-glass window, and let the barrel of ale run to waste, all of which might happen if I was forced to remain for my wage till this day month. At the same time, sir, I'm open to an arrangement. I don't mind, to oblige you, sir, staying on till I find another place as will suit me, if you'll be good enough to send that old woman, Mrs. Trefry, about her business.'

'Most certainly not. Go and be hanged! You've given me notice—pack at once.'

'My wages, sir—I'm content to stay if——'

'Get out of my sight!'

The butler darted back as Mr. Curgenven caught up a square ruler and, whisking it over his head, made as though he would throw it at him. He slammed the library door after him as a declaration of hostilities, much as a man-of-war discharges a gun across the bows of a vessel that belongs to a rival power to bid her stand and engage. Then in burst, without knocking, the upper and under housemaids, their bosoms heaving, and both speaking together.

'They wanted to know whether Mr. Curgenven had ordered that they was to sleep together? They'd always been accustomed to have separate rooms and beds, as was the way in all *gentlemen's* houses, but Mrs. Trefry had gone and said as how that she didn't see why there should be such a lot of servants' rooms occupied, and that they was to have one room between 'em. 'Twasn't as how Jane had any fault to find with Rose-Anne, nor had Rose-Anne any fault to find with Mary Jane, but a principle was involved. Where was it all to end? Would Mr. Curgenven come and look at the room, and measure it, and see if there were accommodation enough for them two? And what did Mrs. Trefry mean by giving them a bit of yellow soap, when they had always been accustomed to Almond Cream? Would Mr. Curgenven try the soap himself and see if it were fitting for their skins? Had Mr. Curgenven authorized Mrs. Trefry to bid them mend the muslin blind at the window that was tore? And if so, which was to do it? It wasn't Jane's place, and it wasn't Rose's place. And if one of them must do it, would he find them the cotton and needle, and a thimble? and not object if his room were not tidied for twenty-four hours, nor his bed made? They couldn't do everything. If they was to do his room, how could they run the tear in the muslin blind? And if they was forced like slaves to mend the blind, how was his room to be done? They would like to know——

Mr. Curgenven put his hands to his ears and ran round his library table, till the maids unable to obtain satisfaction retired in wrath and disgust. Then Percival threw himself down in his arm-chair, and dropping his hands by his side, said, 'I wish I were back in the Pill-box.'

He was not left quiet many minutes before Bathsheba burst in, in livid rage, dragging in the boot-and-knife boy by the arm.

'Master!' gasped she, 'look at this idle toad! There's the pore pigs ha' been and never had no meat these three days—and they're a-squallin' their very lungs away. I told him he was to take the kitchen waste to the sty, instead of Keziah—everything is put on that girl—he does naught but loaf about, and he said he wouldn't. He didn't say it outright to me, or I'd ha' boxed his donkey ears; but he said it to Keziah, and I stopped her as she was trundling a barrow full o' potato parings and throwed away apples, and crusts of bread, and remains o' tarts and puddings, and soups as have turned sour, and lots of butter and cream, and jam and cake, and pickles and fat meat, and what not—all for the pigs. I said she wasn't to take it, and a sin and a shame it is that so much should go to the pigs, and I said that this idle young toad was to feed the pigs, and he hasn't done it; and they've been starving these three days—all because of him; and there's like to be a

summons took out against you, sir, for cruelty to animals—all because of this lazy Tom.'

'I don't care,' said the sullen boy. ''Tain't my place. I've passed the fourth standard. 'Tain't decent as I should mind pigs.'

'And then, master!' pursued the irate housekeeper, 'the pigs' trough is chock-full of dirt of all kinds—broken best service dishes (I saw a well-dish cracked and throwed there)—and I picked a silver teaspoon with the crest on it out of the muck, and there's cinders and pigs' bedding and all kinds o' dirt in their trough. And that's not been cleaned out for months, and the sty be over knee-deep in filth, no bedding of clean straw for the pore beasts. I told this jackanapes he was to clean 'em out, and he says it's no business of his.'

'I don't care,' said the sulky boy, ''tain't for fourth standards to soil their hands wi' pigs.'

'If you can't do your work you shall go,' said Mr. Curgenven.

'I don't care,' retorted the lad; 'vayther said I wasn't to stay if I didn't like the place. I can get a clerkship in the Bank o' England I reckon. I've gone through the fourth standard.'

'Yes—let him go, master,' said the old woman; 'he's no good—none of them are good but Keziah. She does all the work of the house, and gets least wage.'

'Double her wage at once,' said Mr. Curgenven, and threw himself back in the chair.

Mrs. Trefry sent the boy from the room, and then shut the door behind her.

'Master,' said she, 'I think I'm bound to tell you that you may know what to do. I've heard a thing or two, and you'd best inquire into it. The head gardener here, I've been informed, don't do right by his master. Captain Curgenven had a dead horse put to the roots o' the vines, and he dug him up and sold the bones to the old chap as goes round buying rags and bones. So he robbed the vines, and as he disturbed their roots, there have been no grapes this autumn. Then he has sold the tomatoes, and the melons, and the cucumbers, and the pineapples, and the cherries and plums—and the vegetables, every week he sends in a couple o' hampers of fruit and greens to the market at Liskeard and pockets the money. The captain knew nothing about it. And I'm informed, after a little hail-storm, he went and broke half the panes o' glass in the conservatory and sent for the plumber and glazier from Liskeard, who tipped him half-a-crown for his trouble; and he's always running short of garden tools so as to have to order more from the ironmonger, who gives him a Christmas-box for his obligingness; and half the seeds and roots ordered don't come up, for why—he gets an acknowledgment from the seedsman to let

him pass on to him the old seeds as be no good—and get the master to pay for 'em as new and sound.'

'He shall have the sack at once,' said Mr. Curgenven, and he jumped out of the low window upon the gravel drive and strode away in quest of the gardener.

Mr. Quash, the gardener, received his dismissal with haughty indignation.

'I know what it means,' said he. 'Some one has been telling lies; and who that is I don't pretend not to know, and it's just as well you should be informed, sir. It's the keeper Jarvis, it is, and I'll just tell you the why, sir. Mr. Jarvis be uncommon put out, he be, because I've denied him apricots this autumn, for as how there was not enough for the house. Grapes I could not let him have; there was a misfortune to the vines. And he's expected to be supplied with potatoes to save him the trouble of growing them himself. We ran short of them too, and so I couldn't furnish him; and he has took it in dudgeon, and has made up a parcel of lies about me. But I can tell tales too. You may ask for yourself where all the pheasants and the partridges go. You may go up to the mail-cart at seven-forty in the evening and ask what be the meaning of a basket as is directed to the dealer in game at Liskeard, as is often put into the mail-cart just as it starts; and, sir, you may inquire why the guard of the coach, when he gets off at

Trevisa Hill to hook up the shoe, picks up sum'at from behind a hedge just by the gate and chucks it into the boot. If that bean't pheasants for the Plymouth market I'm mistaken greatly.'

Mr. Curgenven walked back from the gardens. 'I shall have to dismiss the keeper also,' said he. Then he saw the footman coming to him without any hat or cap on his fair head.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said the young man, blushing to the roots of his tow-coloured hair, 'but I am awful sorry to say I must give notice.'

'Oh,' said Percival; 'what for, pray?'

'Well, sir, I'm awful grieved, but you see, sir, I've been comfortable here, and would awfully like to stay, but I can't. You see, sir, unbeknown to the late missus, cook and I was married.'

'Why, bless me! she's old enough to be your mother.'

'No, sir! not quite. She's only fourteen years older than me. And you see, sir, she'd be in an awful way if I wasn't to go as well as she. I'm very sorry, very, sir, to seem to disoblige you and put you to any inconvenience.'

'Very well, Charles, you must go, I suppose. Will you tell the groom to put the roan in the dog-cart; I am going out.'

'Please, sir! I'm awful sorry, but I believe the cook have

ordered the roan and dog-cart, and got the groom to drive her into Liskeard.'

'Indeed !—that's cool.'

'To take out a summons against you, sir, for personal violence. She says you bruised her and dashed her against the door-post, and that you used to her horrible, abusive, and scandalous language. I'm awful sorry, sir. I tried to dissuade her, but she would. And when she's determined on a thing, sir, I know there's no turning her. But I hope, sir, you won't think the worse of me, sir, and— Oh! I forgot, sir. I saw the rector and Mrs. Curgenven coming this way, I think to call on you, sir. I'm awful sorry I forgot to say so before.'

CHAPTER IV.

WANTED: AN ADDRESS.

When Percival Curgenven reached the house he found that the rector and his daughter were already within. For the first time in her life Mrs. Curgenven had been obliged to ring at the front door of Curgenven House, and wait to be admitted. She could not now enter with the firm foot of consciousness that she was mistress *de facto* as well as *de jure*. That she was by right still squiress she did not for one instant doubt. But she had yielded her claims in deference to the opinion of her father. She entered with erect head, if not with assured foot; and, being within, looked round with quick turns of the head and inquiring eyes to note any alterations that had been made on which she might animadvert.

'Why, goodness, Percival,' said she, stepping towards the new squire as he entered, with something of the manner of a hostess receiving a guest, 'what is the meaning of this? I

had to ring and ring, and got no answer till I pulled the bell the third time, and then Keziah answered the door. This will never do. You are certain to have visitors—a stream of them—in the afternoon, and the door must be properly attended to. What are all the rest doing? Where is Charles?'

'Charles came to me into the garden to give notice.'

'Well, but there are other servants.'

'They have all given me notice—except such as I have offered the sack to. And cook has borrowed the groom and dog-cart and the roan to drive into the town to take out a summons against me for attempted assassination.'

'Good gracious!' exclaimed the rector, looking back at the door over his shoulder.

'To have a medical certificate that she is bruised, and her shoulder dislocated. I shall have the police here shortly with a summons against me for that, and another for starving my pigs because the boy has neglected them.'

'This is dreadful!' gasped the rector; 'it will make such a scandal. It will be in every paper, in every mouth.'

'I don't care,' said Percival, shrugging his shoulders.

'But you must care, my dear sir,' said Mr. Pamphlet, with solemnity. 'Think what it is to be talked about, and written about—cruelty to animals—brutality to servants—females, too. I wouldn't have had this happen for worlds

—and in *my* parish, and you bearing the same name as my daughter.'

'I don't care the snap of my fingers what folks say or write. What is their opinion to me!'

'My dear Mr. Percival,' remonstrated the rector, 'it is all very well to say this when you are a nobody. Excuse me, but when you were in the Pill-box, it did *not* matter. But now that you occupy a position as squire, are like to be put on the Commission, it is quite another thing. Did you never hear or read of Domitian and Caligula, how that they existed in daily, hourly terror of their servants, their friends, their wives, their subjects; they suspected poison in every draught and a knife up every sleeve. They endeavoured to maintain themselves by instituting a reign of terror; other princes cajoled, bribed, to save themselves. We—every one of us who is above the level of insignificance has to maintain himself as best he can against all his surroundings, he is at their mercy. They have not dagger or hemlock, but they have pointed tongues and slander. If they cannot take our life, they can destroy our reputation and make life intolerable. Don't you suppose that, now that you are squire of Curgenven, your life is to be as independent as it was in the Pill-box. You will have to live behind mosquito curtains, wear them about you all day, and lie behind them all night.'

'Confound it,' said Percival, 'you are all in league to make me regret my elevation.'

'It will have its advantages to you, of course, but the counterbalancing evils will outweigh all the satisfaction it may bring. If any man puts his head above-ground, it is popped at by a hundred rifles.'

'Here are the Tregonticks!' exclaimed Mrs. Curgenven, as a carriage with livery servants on the box, and a bloom of ladies within, passed the window. 'That really is too much—Lady Tregontick bringing all her daughters here on a Brautschau, as the Germans call it. Percival, say "Not at home!"'

'I have no one to take the message,' said Mr. Curgenven, 'unless the kitchen-maid will go. I fancy Charles has walked off to lament over his departure with the under-gardener.'

Next moment, however, the door was opened by the footman, and Lady Tregontick and the Misses Tregontick were announced. The lady was round, rosy, sparkling. She went up to Mr. Percival with gush, and to Mrs. Curgenven also with effusion.

'How do you do, Mr. Curgenven? I really must apologize. It is odd I know, but Sir Sampson is so shy. You will not mind my leaving his card. I have to do all calls for him. Oh, Mrs. Curgenven, this is delightful! The fact is my girls

and I were coming on to call on you—that is why they are here. Philippa is dying to see your Alice—Alice is such a pet of hers.' Then to Percival: 'I took the liberty of invading you with my daughters because—you see we come from such a distance, and Irene's back is not strong, and I thought she would be over-tired in the carriage. Bless me! did I introduce you?—my eldest, Gweniver; my second, Irene; the baby—that's Philippa. We call her baby because she was the last, but, as you see, she is a big girl, and is out. You'll excuse Sir Sampson. I know you will. I calculate on Curgenven good-nature. It is proverbial. Sir Sampson is the shyest man in creation. His shyness has become a disease. He never goes out. When any one calls, if he is in the garden he hides behind a rhododendron bush. You may see his feet below and his hat above it—like an ostrich, if he can bury his head he thinks no one can see him. But there—you are so good-natured. I see it in your eye; and you'll forgive us never calling when you were in Liskeard; the fact is—how long were you there?'

'Twelve years.'

'And we did not know of it for three years. In the country it is so long before one hears of a stranger settling in one's midst, and then after that it has been a daily battle with me to overcome Sir Sampson. Poor fellow, he has promised,

and I built on his promises, but they always failed. So time slipped away and we never called—or rather he never did. Then to-day I said to him, "Sampson, if you *will* not, I *must*. I will not endure the opprobrium of being regarded as unneighbourly and unkind." We were coming—my girls and I—to the rectory, and I thought just to leave Sir Sampson's card, put my hands together and say, "Please forgive! and allow me to call instead of Sir Sampson."'

'Shall I ring for tea?' asked Jane Curgenven.

'Oh, certainly,' answered Percival. 'But I don't suppose there is any kettle on—and the fire in the kitchen will be out, as the cook has departed to take out a summons against me, and has borrowed for the purpose——'

'Never mind, never mind that,' said Mrs. Curgenven hastily. 'We don't draw all our domestic worries before the public.'

Tea was ordered and was a very long time in coming. When it did arrive the water was not only not boiling but was smoked. There was, moreover, no sugar.

Mrs. Curgenven rang.

The footman returned, and she asked for the sugar-basin. Charles hesitated, became red to the roots of his fair hair, and when the lady repeated her order, he replied in a low voice—

'Please, ma'am, it is run out.'

'Run out? What do you mean?'

'The boy have filled his mouth and pockets, and gone—and I can't find the housekeeper with the key of the store-room to get more out. Shall I bring in some brown, ma'am? There are a few spoonfuls in a bowl in the kitchen.'

Whilst this conversation was maintained in an undertone, at a sign from Mrs. Curgenven, which he perfectly understood, Mr. Pamphlet raised his voice and talked sufficiently loudly to divert the attention of the visitors. Happily none of the ladies took their tea sweetened. Whilst they were engaged in conversation Jane was in a condition of irritation. She had found smears as from greasy fingers on one of the cups and a high-milk mark of dirt within the cream-jug. She would take no tea herself, and the smoked insipid decoction was clearly not relished by the visitors. She, however, took a piece of thin bread-and-butter, but after a bite put it hastily down again. The bread had been cut with an oniony knife.

Presently the Tregonticks left, having first begged Mrs. Curgenven to accept their call as made upon her at the rectory. As Lady Tregontick said, she really had come to make that visit, and it was with that intention her girls had accompanied her. Now Mrs. Curgenven was not at home she could not go to the parsonage, and Mrs. Curgenven must accept the will for the deed, and Mr. Pamphlet accept a card she would leave with him from Sir Sampson, who was really too tiresome; he

had given way to his shyness till it had grown on him, and become quite an affliction.

No sooner were the Tregonticks gone than Mrs. Curgenven turned on Percival with an exclamation of 'Really! you must get married. This never will do. Old Mrs. Trefry is not up to the mark. She has gone off with the key—no sugar. The cups and the cream-jug are simply disgusting. The character of the house is likely to suffer. You must either get married or get a proper housekeeper, only—don't take one of the Tregonticks: I don't mean as housekeeper, you understand. That woman came here to throw her daughters at your head—it is all fudge about her bringing them to see Alice, and her coming here to call on me, and it is all fudge about Sir Sampson's shyness, too. It is laziness, nothing else. Just look here, Percival—no, not at the outside of the cream-jug, but at the inside. Do you not observe the line round the interior? The jug has been put aside with the cream in it, to catch the dust and curdle; then—all in a scramble, to-day when wanted, some one turns out the nasty mess, and hastily puts in fresh cream. It is too revolting. This must not go on. What are you going to do about servants? Advertise? go to a registry office! Goodness me! and this is the time of all others when you most want servants—when the whole neighbourhood will make calls and have its eyes open to see what sort of an

establishment you keep up—and talk about it afterwards for three months.'

Suddenly up jumped Mr. Percival Curgenven, shook himself as though to shake away the worries that were accumulating on him, and said—'By George! I shall be off!'

'Where to?'

'Why, to Scotland. I can't stand and face all these callers, and I must have a bit of a change after these confounded worries—and see about—that is to say——' he hesitated. 'I say, Jane, can I do anything for you at Drumduskie? can I take a message to Mrs. Boxholder or the girls?'

'You are going there!' exclaimed Mrs. Curgenven, with a flush in her cheeks and a glance at her father. 'Why, Percival! are they expecting you?'

'No, I have not said a word.'

'But—are you going to stay with them at Drumduskie?'

'No, not that; I am going there—let me see—fishing.'

'Fishing! Percival—now—at this time?'

'Never mind why—I am going there. I want to get away from this deuce of a worry. Is not that enough? I shall find a shake-down somewhere.'

'I am sure my sister will be charmed to take you in. You know her.'

'Oh yes; I met her when she was down staying here, and

Rose, too. She's a nice girl. And I know the little one also. I forget her name.'

'Flora.'

'Yes, Flora. Of course, she's only a school-girl.'

'But you will write?'

'No, I sha'n't, I'll drop in. I shall go to the inn. If they ask me to stay with them I may accept, but I don't know. I like my independence, my pipe and my whisky, and to stretch my legs, as and where and how I like. No; I shall put up for a day or two at the inn. If you have a commission I'll take it.'

Then Charles, the footman, came in.

'There is Mr. Physic in the study, sir,' he said. 'Shall I tell him to wait?'

'Not for us,' said Mrs. Curgenven, hastily rising. 'No, we must go. Come, papa. We will not detain you, Percival, from business.'

'And,' said Mr. Pamphlet, 'do try to compromise this matter with the cook—or shall Jane see her, and attempt an arrangement? I dare say a five-pound note will suffice. Whatever you do, keep out of the papers, and if it can't be done otherwise, pay for being passed over. We won't detain you now.'

'Don't get Physic to find servants for you, Percival,' said

Mrs. Curgenven, as she left the room. 'But can I help you, or will you leave it till you return from Scotland?'

When Mrs. Curgenven was outside with her father, she put her hand on his arm, pressed it, and said, 'You see he was struck with Rose. I had an idea at the time when she was staying with us last summer, and Percival was in the house too. He would make her laugh with his nonsense, and take her about the grounds to see this and that, and chaff her about a Scottish accent, and the tartan, and all that sort of thing.'

'But, my dear Jane, he is some twenty or thirty years older than Rose.'

'What of that? it will be pleasant for me to have a niece here rather than a stranger; and Lady Tregontick will most certainly tackle him for one of her daughters unless he be put beyond her reach.'

'But it will provoke comment, I fear.'

'It will make Lady Tregontick ready to tear out my eyes. If I can't be at Curgenven myself, let us have there one of ourselves and not a stranger—that is all I desire. Besides, Percival needs licking into shape, and Rose is the woman to bring him into order; she is more like her mother and me than any one I know.'

CHAPTER V.

THE GHOST OF A WILL.

When Mr. Percival Curgenven entered the library, he found Physic at the window, with his hands behind his back under the tails of his coat, watching the departure of Mr. Pamphlet and his daughter. The agent's sides were shaking with laughter.

Physic turned round, and withdrawing one hand, and pointing with his thumb through the glass, said: 'Madam would give a thousand pounds to be back here again and able to turn you out.'

'I dare say,' replied Percival carelessly. 'And I don't know that I should particularly object to be out of it.'

'Oh, come! Tell that to the marines.'

'It's a fact. If I were in the Pill-box, no cook would borrow my dog-cart, coachman, and roan to drive into town to take

out a summons against me—for one thing because I shouldn't have a cook there—and life would be worth living then.'

'I don't understand.'

'It doesn't matter,' said Percival, throwing himself into a chair. 'As Jane said, one needn't rake out all one's domestic worries before strangers.'

'There's a difference between four thousand and a hundred and fifty, eh?' said the agent with a leer.

'Materially, a difference of three thousand eight hundred and fifty worries. I haven't very broad shoulders, I don't think I can stand them all.'

'Four thousand a year broadens the shoulders wonderfully, makes epaulettes, in fact. You have not as yet been here long enough to enjoy the comfort of being able to thrust your fingers over knuckles in gold.'

'I have been here long enough to get my hands full of prickles.'

'There are ups and downs in this world,' said Physic, 'and those who rise the fastest are often the quickest to descend.'

'I suppose so,' observed Percival with indifference, 'though how I'm to be tumbled back into nothingness is not clear to me.'

'You'd go down like lead if another will were to turn up.'

'Ah! Another will—perhaps so. But none has been found.'

'Awkward for you, sir, were one discovered.'

'Perhaps so.'

Percival lit a cigar.

'Do you smoke?'

'Thank you, if I may.'

The agent helped himself from Percival's case, and lit his cigar. He puffed at it for a minute without saying anything. Then he withdrew the cigar from his mouth between his two first fingers, and said, looking sideways at Percival, 'I suppose you have no suspicion that the captain made another will.'

'By George, no!' exclaimed Mr. Curgenven, startled out of his indifference. 'When?'

'Look here,' said Physic, 'I've got the draft of it. I, in fact, drew it up for him. May I spread it on the desk? You'd like to look it through. It is only a rough draft, and not a signed and attested will.'

He went to the writing-table, replaced the cigar between his lips, and drew an envelope from his pocket, opened it, and extracted a folded paper. He laid it on the desk that was upon the table, and passed his hand over it, spreading it out, and flattening the creases.

'There you are, sir, look as long as you like.'

Percival went to the table, put down his cigar beside the desk, and carefully read the document. When he had mastered the contents, and had turned it over and made sure it was unsigned, he said—

'I see. Lambert wanted to provide for his wife—I mean for Jane—in the event of his first wife appearing on the scene. I suppose this will if executed would be a legal document?'

'No doubt about it. Everything is left to Jane Pamphlet, commonly known as Jane Curgenven, and to you in trust for his daughter Alice. There is provision, as you see, for your annuity to continue as trustee, and something for madam.'

'So I see,' said Percival musingly; 'are you sure he never made such a will?'

'I am not sure at all. This is the rough draft; he had the fair copy from me.'

'Then where is it?'

'Exactly—where?'

'Jane cannot have found it. It was not in the box of deeds nor in his desk. Of course, if she had found it, she would have produced it.'

'Of course she would.'

'Then where can it be? Do you know whether it was ever executed?'

'I am almost sure that it was.'

'What makes you almost sure?'

'Because the captain told me he had signed it, and told me who had witnessed his signature. He purposely chose two ignorant and illiterate men, so he informed me, lest they should get a glimpse of the contents.'

'Who were they?'

'Old Roger Morideg and Pike the trainer.'

'By George! I'll ask them about it.'

'I believe Morideg is in prison. He was sent there for violent conduct towards me.'

'No, he is out. He came back to his cottage yesterday, and, by Jove! Physic, not in the most affectionate mood towards yourself. I advise you to look out. The old chap is furious, and he is half a savage.'

'I am not afraid of him. If he touches me, I shall send him to prison again, and next Lady-day his notice will have expired, and I shall turn him out of his cottage and tear it down. I am getting up a company for working the tin there, and begin operations next spring.'

'Well, never mind the tin-mine. What about this will? If it was executed I suppose it is somewhere.'

'And if somewhere, then you will have to return to the Pill-box, and give up your three thousand eight hundred and fifty worries for a hundred and fifty, as before.'

Percival seated himself, and took up the cigar. It had gone out.

'I say, lend me a light, Physic,' he said. As he put his cigar to that of the agent his hand shook, and he had difficulty in relighting his weed. Then he threw himself into an arm-chair, and looked round the library at the handsome mahogany furniture, the chairs leather covered, the bookcases with the well-bound volumes on the shelves, the white marble busts above the cases, the deep Turkey carpet on the floor, and the plush curtains to the windows. Certainly he would not readily abandon the possession of such a house, so many comforts, the wealth, the position. He had felt the annoyances to which he had been subjected, but, after all, they were trifling and transitory, and Curgenven House, the grounds, the estate, the shooting, the fishing, the manorial lordship, and four thousand a year were substantial comforts. He had tasted them, and he could not abandon them without a pang. Then, there was Justinian to be considered. He was well aware that he had not given the boy an education that would fit him to take his proper place in life; how could he on his little income? But now he intended to have a tutor for him, and insist on his sticking to his books, and then send him to Oxford to polish him up. Justinian had brains, and he had good sense. He would know that now he must qualify to be a country gentle-

man. But if the estate were to go from him, back Justinian would fall into his former condition, and he must become a settler in a colony without capital on which to settle, or go to a desk in a counting-house. And Justinian had been more delighted at the change of position than he had been himself. The boy was by nature cut out to be a young squire. The father loved and was proud of his boy. It would be a bitter grief to him to see the lad disappointed.

Physic watched Percival's face. He divined what was working in his brain.

'I suppose,' said the agent slowly, 'if you were to come across that will, it would go pretty quickly into the fire yonder.' He pointed with his cigar to the grate with oak logs burning in it.

'By Jove, no!' exclaimed Percival, drawing his feet back sharply. 'I'm not a scoundrel.'

'What! you would produce this will and upset the other?'

'I suppose so. I could do no otherwise.'

Physic looked at him with surprise. He could not understand whether Percival Curgenven were a hypocrite or a fool.

'What! you'd turn yourself out head and heels from this place?'

'If the will were to be discovered, of course I would. I'm

not so sure that I ought not to act on the mere draft. It was clearly what poor Lambert intended.'

'Unless he destroyed the will after he had made it.'

'Why should he do that?'

'Well, he might not like to cast any suspicion on his marriage. It would have been awkward, were that will to be produced and suddenly Mrs. Jane to find that she had not been a wife at all, but a——'

'Yes—yes—yes!' said Percival hastily. 'Of course that is like enough, when years passed and Theresa never showed.'

His face cleared, he drew a long breath, he was relieved from his fear. 'Yes—that is certain. He thought it best to leave the whole matter to my discretion. Jane sha'n't suffer; nor, by George! shall Alice. I will act as I know would have commended itself to dear old Lambert; that I swear.'

'There is another idea strikes me,' said Physic. 'Some one may have had that will given to him to use or not to use, according as circumstances might require.'

'Yes—there is that,' said Percival, again looking blank. 'Have you the will?'

'I—how can you think that?'

'From your making the suggestion. But, of course, you

have not, or you would have come forward with it. It can't be at the bank, I suppose.'

'No, it is not at the bank.'

'Then I don't know where it can be, if it exists.'

'And if eventually it should be sprung on you by some one to whom it was confided, and he offered to destroy it for—for a consideration?'

'Destroy the will?'

'Yes, or, rather, say nothing about it. Why, 'pon my word, a thousand pounds would be nothing like the value to you of having that paper in your hands, or having some one else to tear it to pieces and burn it, without your having touched it.'

'I'm not a scoundrel,' said Percival, uneasily. 'I do not understand you. Is that will in existence? If it is, who has it? Mind what I say. Not one step would I take to suppress it. If I knew that you, say, had it, or the butler, or that damned cook who has borrowed—but there, never mind that—I'd obtain an order or warrant, or whatever you call it, to have it delivered up, and I'd carry it to the registrar myself and prove it.'

'And your own self saw in half the branch on which you sit?'

'I would do what is right and honourable. I am a Curgenven. I'd go back to my hundred and fifty and into the Pill-

box, and bundle Justinian off to the backwoods with a light heart—never would I connive at a piece of rascality such as you suggest.'

'Is this talk?' asked Physic, still uncertain. 'Let us suppose this draft were the actual signed and attested will, and I were to say, Give me a thousand pounds, and I put it in my pocket and walk away with it, and never shall it be seen by human eye again. Come, what would be your decision?'

'I could never look my boy in the face again if I did such a dishonest act. If you have the real will, produce it, and see if I am not as good as my word.'

'I haven't the will, so you may rest satisfied you will not be put to the test.'

Physic folded up the draft, replaced it in the envelope, and consigned it once more to his pocket.

'I think I'll say good-afternoon,' said he. 'I have one or two little jobs to see to before returning to Liskeard.'

'Good-afternoon,' said Percival listlessly; and he did not look up at the agent as he left the study. No sooner was he out of the room, however, than Percival started from his chair, ran to the door, and called him back.

'I say—Physic! I'm off to Scotland—to-day, to-morrow, when I can. Hang it! The cook has borrowed my trap

and horse, but I suppose there is another. I can have the wagonette anyhow. Have you a train-book? I am sick of this. I must go. I only wait to have my things tumbled into a portmanteau, and then say good-bye to Justinian.'

'Off to Scotland! This is sudden.'

'Yes, and all the servants here are in insurrection, and all the neighbours with marriageable daughters are pouring in, besieging me. I must find—I mean I must—— But there, never mind what I mean. My head has been on a spin ever since I came in for this estate, and may I be hanged if I know what I ought to do about it now. Will you square off these servants? I can't—they are beyond me. Pay them what is necessary, and threaten that cook with prosecution for having taken my dog-cart, roan, and groom without leave. Jane had offered to meddle, but I won't have her in the place. You take this off my hands. Justinian will get along without me. Bathsheba will see that he does not come short. Oh—and give an eye that the gardener does not rob the greenhouses of all the valuable plants and cut the roots of the fruit trees. That is what these retiring gardeners do. And see that the maids don't smash any of the china, and that the butler doesn't walk off with any of the silver, and the housemaid run a broom-handle through any of the pictures. And get me in another lot of servants by the time I come back.'

'When will that be?'

'That is more than I can say.'

'But—if I may ask—what takes you to Scotland?'

'The mail, my boy. If you want to know my reason for going, wait and see. I'll make you rub your eyes.'

CHAPTER VI.

THE FOURTEENTH.

'Drumduskie! Is it not sweet?'

'What is sweet, my love?'

'What is sweet? Why, what else can I mean, what else can I be thinking of, but that Rose is going to become Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven?'

'Is it settled?' asked Mr. Boxholder.

'Settled! No, not exactly that. But everything is on the high-road to a settlement. Mr. Percival has arrived, and is staying at the Railway Hotel. I invited him to be our guest, but he declined. I can understand his delicacy.'

'But, surely, Isabella—because Mr. Jack This or Mr. Tom That is put up at the Railway Hotel, that does not constitute him our son-in-law.'

Mrs. Boxholder turned a stony eye on her husband, and he shrank under her petrifying stare.

'Upon my word, Drumduskie, you forget your manners! Do you know whom you are addressing?'

After holding him with her eye in speechless collapse for a minute, she sighed: 'Well, one cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. I suppose a good deal of inherent barbarism remains in the Scottish blood. I will pass this over and answer your question. Mr. Percival Curgenven is here, and the purpose of his coming all the way from Cornwall has been communicated to me by Jane. He told her that he came here to seek a wife.'

'He's a little, a—I mean a wee bit old for Rose,' said Mr. Boxholder timidly, holding the mantelshelf.

'Not a bit. The match is suitable in every way. He is, I do allow, a little cubbish—has, in spite of his age, never grown quite out of cubdom; he has, I believe, tumbled about a long time in the backwoods, or the bush, or jungle, or somewhere of the sort; but if ever there were a girl calculated to bring such a man to order and trim him into shape it is my child. What a nose she has!'

'Yes, she has a nose.'

'I mean such character in it.'

'Yes, dear, I suppose so, a great deal of character in her nose.'

'And breeding,' added Mrs. Boxholder.

'No doubt, darling. Plenty of breeding in her nose.'

'She will look, every inch, the squiress of Curgenven. No one could have been found more suitable to succeed Jane. She also had a nose.'

'Of course she had, my sweet.'

'I mean a Pamphlet nose.'

Mrs. Boxholder lighted a spill at the fire and applied the flame to the candles. 'I hear wheels,' she said. 'It is those McGruffs, always either half-an-hour too soon, or half-an-hour too late.'

Mr. and Mrs. Boxholder were in evening dress; the lady in mauve silk and darker velvet, with lace and diamonds, not many diamonds, nor fine, but some. She had not found that there was jewellery among the heirlooms of the MacNaughts of Drumduskie, so she had obliged her husband to give her some. 'It was incumbent on the MacNaught to have his wife adorned in a manner suitable to her position,' she had said. 'It *is* the McGruffs,' said Mrs. Boxholder. 'Now, Drumduskie, mind, Rose is to have a proper dower. What are you going to give her? She shall not be sent off like a beggar.'

'My dear, upon my word, I have not considered.'

'Then the sooner you consider the better. Mr. Percival proposes to-night. You shall not go to sleep till you have decided what to give her; and mind, I'll pull your pillow from

under your head and throw it across the room if the sum you propose does not seem reasonable to me.'

'I'll do my best, my darling, I will indeed. But here come the McGruffs. Where is the list of those who are to take in whom?'

'It will come right. I have not made out the list. I'll settle it; and, look here, no sneaking off to the smoking-room with one or two chums, and leaving me to entertain the rest.' Then: 'How do you do, dear Mrs. McGruff? So delighted to see you.'

Mr. Percival Curgenven was, in fact, at Drumduskie, and had called that afternoon, when Mrs. Boxholder had invited him to dinner. As it happened, she had a pleasant little party assembling that evening at her house, and she would be charmed if Mr. Percival would make one of the guests. He had accepted. Mrs. Boxholder had no doubt whatever as to his intentions, because Mrs. Jane Curgenven had had no doubt whatever.

Percival had met Mrs. Boxholder and her eldest daughter Rose more than once at Curgenven when they were staying there. Last summer he had been a guest in the house at the same time. Percival had amused himself with playful passages of arms with Miss Boxholder. She was a prim and rigid old young woman, and he had found entertainment in startling

her and disturbing her gravity. Rose did not care for him, had not given him a thought, save as a scatterbrained, half-wild Curgenven cousin. Now she was quite unprepared by her mother for receiving him as a suitor. But Mrs. Boxholder knew her daughter, and was well aware that she would decide in accordance with prudence. She was not the young lady to let slip four thousand per annum for such a trifle as the encumbrance of a man for whom she did not care.

The guests arrived, mainly together, about twelve minutes after the McGruffs. Then Mrs. Boxholder was greatly taken up with receiving them, and whisking about, informing the gentlemen whom they were to escort in to dinner. She acted on her husband much as a little whirlwind on a feather, pursuing it, spinning it, driving it from place to place.

'Drumduskie, you take in Lady Duff-Duff. Now mind you carve the goose, and remember that there is stuffing.'

When she had revolved into another corner of the drawing-room she caught him again, and said in an undertone: Remember; over the wine no London shop talk.' Then, coming on Mr. Percival: 'Ah, Mr. Curgenven, how good of you to come to us North Britons from delightful Cornwall! You will take in my daughter Rose, and don't squabble, as you used to at dear Curgenven.' Presently she swept across the drawing-room towards Mr. Boxholder, who had got to

the other side of the room, as he usually did. 'Now, really, haven't you heard the butler announce that dinner is ready? Do, for pity's sake, take in Lady Duff-Duff.'

'My dear, I am looking for her.'

'You won't find her in a corner. She is on the sofa, there behind the cushion,' pointing to a diminutive old lady who sat in a little heap, and was the most untidily and incongruously dressed person in the room.

After Mr. Boxholder had offered his arm to this lady all the rest followed, and the hostess brought up the rear with Sir Archibald Duff-Duff.

'Dear me!' exclaimed Mrs. Boxholder. 'I'm so sorry, Mr. West, that you have no partner. It is most unfortunate; I am heart-broken.' This to a solitary gentleman. In fact, the party had been made up before the invitation of Mr. Percival Curgenven, so that Mr. West's partner had been consigned to some one else.

But no sooner was grace said, and all were seated, than Mrs. Boxholder started to her feet with an exclamation of dismay that created a dead silence.

'Goodness me!' she said; 'we are thirteen.'

'Well,' responded Mr. Boxholder from the further end of the table, 'and what of that, my dear?'

'Why, Drumduskie, we cannot sit down thirteen to table.'

'Why not? It won't hurt us.'

'My dear, it is not possible. We are in Scotland, and must be superstitious. You forget. Thirteen! It will never do. Run, Thompson, to the school-room for Miss Flora.'

'Are we really thirteen?' asked Rose. Then she began to count, 'I am one;' then she counted all round the table, and the thirteenth fell on Percival Curgenven.

'No, no,' said he, 'let me count the opposite way. You are one,—two,—three;' the thirteenth then fell to him.

'Well,' said he with a laugh, 'then I won't be the thirteenth, I'll sit at another table. In Cornwall we are as superstitious as you are in Scotland, or are supposed to be.'

'Please, ma'am,' said the servant, returning from the school-room, 'Miss Flora has a sick head-ache, and is gone to bed.'

'There! a fate is in it,' said Sir Archibald; 'one of us must be sacrificed, you see.'

'Let two of us go to a side table,' said Percival, 'Miss Rose and I; then if we quarrel we shall disturb no one.'

Mrs. Boxholder hesitated a moment, and then said, 'No, we cannot do that.'

'I am the odd man,' said Mr. West; 'surely I am the one who should perish for the rest. Let me go to the side table.'

'No, Mr. West,' answered the hostess. 'If you do not mind—I am very sorry, but I will give you a partner. I am

ashamed to ask it, but it will be the simplest arrangement. Would you object to the governess coming to be fourteenth, and sitting between you and Mr. Curgenven?'

'Delighted, I am sure,' said Mr. West.

'You are most kind to say so,' remarked Mrs. Boxholder; and then to the servant: 'Thompson, go to the school-room and tell Mrs. Lambert to come here as she is, not to dress, we can't wait for that. We cannot begin till she comes to be the fourteenth.' Then to Mr. West: 'I am sure you are most self-sacrificing; I am sorry to seem to put upon you, but you see I cannot help myself. You need not talk to her more than you like.'

A moment later Theresa entered, not agitated, quiet in demeanour, apparently indifferent to the fact that she was not in evening dress. Her pale sallow face was handsome, and those who saw that forgot how she was dressed.

Mr. West at once looked with a gratified expression at the hostess that plainly said, 'I am by no means dissatisfied with my lot,' but Mrs. Boxholder did not observe it; with her fan she pointed haughtily to the empty seat, and Theresa, with a slight bow to her, took the place indicated.

At once Percival turned and greeted her with effusion. 'So,' said he, 'I see you at length. Only think of this! As a stop-gap! I am so glad—so glad you are beside me.'

She raised her large speaking eyes and smiled.

There was something that touched Percival's heart in the solitariness of Theresa. He looked round the table at the ladies there, well dressed—with the exception of Lady Duff-Duff—got up to look their best, and then he turned to Theresa, in her sober dark dress without other adornment than a flower fastened in her bosom, her dark hair glossy and smooth, her ivory complexion and lustrous eyes! In beauty—though that was matured and perhaps tending to decline—she was incomparably superior to those who were in full war-paint at table. And yet she made no assumption to be anything.

'Theresa,' said Percival in a low tone, 'I must have a word with you presently.'

'I do not know when it can be.'

'I have come all the way for your answer to my question.'

'What question?'

'That I cast through the carriage-window.'

She looked into her plate. 'I cannot give it you now.'

'No, I do not exact it now. But have it I must.'

Nothing further passed between them; Percival's attention was drawn away by Miss Boxholder, who wanted to know what Mr. Curgenven could tell her about Aunt Jane and

Alice and Mr. Pamphlet, and about various matters connected with Curgenven.

Percival did his best to answer, and Mrs. Boxholder glanced with satisfaction at her daughter and guest, in the conviction that they were getting on famously together.

Presently Percival had another chance of turning to his neighbour on the other side.

'Theresa! do you know that you have saved my life?'

'Surely not.'

'Yes, I was number thirteen, and you came in and made the fourteenth, so I have escaped. I owe you a debt for that.'

'An imaginary debt is easily repaid. I owe you a real obligation, for you set and healed my arm.'

'Ah! I forgot about that. So you are well now?'

'Yes, except for a slight stiffness. Now pray talk to Miss Rose, or her mother will visit your neglect on me.'

'Where shall you be after dinner?'

'That depends. If Mrs. Boxholder wishes my presence, in the drawing-room. If not, I suppose I shall go back to the school-room.'

'Very well. I shall find you somewhere; in the drawing-room or the school-room. I have come to Scotland to see you —and you only.'

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE SCHOOL-ROOM.

When Percival Curgenven entered the drawing-room with the gentlemen after the coffee had been passed round, his eye wandered in quest of Theresa, and he was soon aware that she was not there. Mrs. Boxholder had given her a look accompanied by a slight wave of her hand as she rose from table; this had not escaped Percival, and he understood now its significance.

Theresa had accomplished what had been required of her, to make the fourteenth, and was dismissed back into seclusion, to the nursery or to the school-room, and was not to appear in the drawing-room. She was not dressed for the evening, and was consequently unsuited to be with the rest, and only suffered to be among them for so long as was required to avert ill-luck from the party.

Percival's teeth closed, and a little spot of colour rose on

his cheek-bones. If Mrs. Boxholder had looked his way she would not have liked the expression of his eye turned towards her.

He hoped against hope that Theresa would return. The party was not lively; it consisted for the most part of elderly persons, and there were elements that damped cheerfulness. Conversation rose, flagged, rose again, again to flag. A young lady sang, and sang out of tune. Mr. West attempted a humorous ditty, but the accompanist had never tried the piece before, did not catch the character, and was unable to accommodate the time to Mr. West's somewhat capricious rendering. Consequently voice and piano were not together, and the comic song proved a dismal failure; no one laughed, and Mr. West, very much ashamed of himself, retired into a corner and looked at an album of photographs.

Miss Rose without much persuasion was induced to play 'Le Carnaval de Venise,' of which every one knew every note by heart; she played it in a hard, unsympathetic manner. Conversation halted at the first few bars, and then resumed its uneven and straggling course. Mr. Curgenven stood by the piano and turned over the music pages for Rose.

'Now,' said he, 'why do you not give us the "Drumduskie Pibroch" or the "MacNaught Strathspey"?'

Miss Boxholder looked sharply at him to see whether he

were making fun of her, but his muscles did not betray his thoughts. 'Come,' said he, 'we are old acquaintances; a word with you in the conservatory.'

The French windows opened into a glazed gallery that ran the length of the house, and was lighted by pendant lamps of ruby glass. It was furnished with flowers and ferns and plants of variegated foliage.

Mrs. Boxholder's eye followed Mr. Curgenven and her daughter as they entered the conservatory, and she flashed a gleam of triumph across the room at her husband, then hinted to Lady Duff-Duff the secret that filled her maternal heart with satisfaction.

'To propose, is he?' asked Lady Duff-Duff in a loud tone. She was somewhat deaf herself and spoke loudly, as though every one she addressed were three degrees deafer than herself. Mrs. Boxholder bit her lip. The words had been overheard, and at once a good many pairs of eyes were directed towards the conservatory.

When Percival was out of the room with Rose Boxholder he said: 'I will tell you at once what I want. How is your governess's arm? I attended her after the accident. Indeed, it was Justinian and I who brought it about, and I feel a sort of self-reproach accordingly.'

'I suppose her arm is better.'

'She can use it; I saw that at dinner. Is it quite well?'

'I do not know, I suppose so.'

'I dare say you would be good enough to allow me to see her for a moment, and find out that all is well. Her collar-bone was broken.'

'Oh, certainly. I fancy she is in the school-room. We can get to it this way; one window opens into the conservatory.'

'I shall be much obliged. You know I am a surgeon by profession, and this good lady was my patient.'

Rose Boxholder led the way to the end of the conservatory and tapped at a French window over which curtains hung; they were drawn aside, and Theresa appeared and unbolted the door.

Rose stepped in, and as she did so Percival trod on the train of her gown and tore it out of the gathers. She turned on him with an expression of annoyance, and looked at the mischief done.

'You must go to Louisa and ask her to run it up for you,' said Theresa; 'you cannot return into the drawing-room in this condition.'

Rose, without another word, but with shrugged shoulders and a sulky mouth, swung out of the school-room in quest of the lady's-maid; so Percival and Theresa were left together.

The school-room was plainly furnished, but comfortable. A pleasant fire was burning in the grate. By this Theresa had been seated in a low chair. There was no other light in the room save that thrown out by the coal fire.

'You were sitting there,' said Percival, pointing to the place from which she had risen to admit him and Rose. 'Go back there again, and let me take a chair by you. I have come nominally to inquire about your collar-bone, but you know very well that I did not come from Cornwall for that alone. You gave me no answer to a question I asked of you as you whirled away from Plymouth. And, by the bye, there is some money I borrowed of you——'

'You sent it me.'

'Did I? I had forgotten. That was marvellous; I am usually forgetful.'

Percival Curgenven took a chair on the further side of the fire-place to that occupied by Theresa on her low seat.

'How are you here?' he asked. 'Are they kind to you?'

She had her hands folded on her knee. Her fingers plucked at her dress; she slightly smiled: 'I suppose so—as much as I can expect. I must live, and I must take what I can to live.'

'Now I have come to ask you to leave this situation, and

come to Curgenven. My cook borrowed my dog-cart and groom and roan—without asking leave——'

'What, you want me to take your situation as cook?' she said, laughing.

'No; do not misunderstand me. All the servants are in revolt. I do not understand how to manage them. I got on well enough in the Pill-box, but in Curgenven I am lost. I must have a wife to manage for me.'

'As a sort of upper servant?'

'No,' said Percival impatiently. 'Of course not. I am bewildered at Curgenven. I want a wife to manage for me. I have not been accustomed to any other than a kick-about life. I have tried ranching and sheep-farming and timber-felling, surgery, journalism, and have failed in all I undertook, but never so dead as in my present position as squire. I bid fair to upset the whole cart. Come and be my wife, Theresa, and put me and Justinian and the place to rights. There is Justinian. He must be sent to college, or something done with him, and I don't know how to set about it. Then I don't know how to pour out afternoon tea; I gave tea-extract strong as poison to one and water to another; so that you see I positively must have a wife.'

Theresa remained looking musingly into the fire with a half-smile on her face, but with pain in the smile as well as amuse-

ment. She did not speak for some minutes, but at last looked up full at Percival and said: 'I should indeed be ungrateful were I to take you at your word without a caution. Do you not see that the wife you want is quite another woman from myself? You require one full of experience of English social life, not one who has been something of a Bohemian in her career as well as by birth. You need one who will supply all that is wanting in yourself. You and I have been hustled about in the world, have lived a hand-to-mouth life, associated not with the best classes, the well-to-do, and well-ballasted. You feel now that you are at a loss how to steer in a shoaly sea, and you ask for a pilot. For that I am unsuited. Take to you one who has grown up in the great social cage, who sees bars on every side and never thinks of beating her wings against these bars, who is content with the groundsel and sugar thrust in betwixt the bars, and has not the wish to cater for herself. That is the mate you require.'

'I know what you mean,' said Percival irritably; 'you advise me to match myself with a Jane Curgenven, who would drive Justinian into revolt in a week and send me flying from her into space in a fortnight. Do you think it possible I could endure such a woman? One such as Jane cannot think outside the cage-bars. The world without, the glorious sunshine, the free air, the rustling trees, the buttercup meadows

are tabooed. The birds of the air that nest in hedge and under ivy are condemned and abhorred. Thank you for your kind advice; it is unpalatable, and I will not take it. Achilles and Siegfried were case-hardened, but each had a vulnerable point, one at the heel, the other between the shoulder-blades, but such a woman as Jane Curgenven is without a point through which a needle might be thrust to prick her conscience. Such women drive me to rebellion. No, Theresa, I must have a wife who has gone through some such experience in life as myself, who can understand my thoughts and troubles and difficulties.'

'Do you know my story?'

'I know how badly treated you were.'

'That is not all. By birth I am almost worse than a nobody. Mrs. Fenton's relatives said that I was picked out of a gutter, and harsh though the expression was, it is almost true. My mother was some tramp; she had lost her husband; she was taken ill with fever in a poor canvas tent in a raw wet autumn in a green lane near where Mrs. Fenton lived in Hampshire. I believe, but for her infinite kindness and gentle pity, I should have died as well as my mother. The parish authorities desired to move my mother; the ground was sodden, the November rains had soaked the canvas of the tent and the gales torn it; but the doctor who was summoned said

that she could not be removed to the workhouse, and then dear Mrs. Fenton intervened and took my mother in. I was saved, but my mother died. Who my father was I do not know, who my mother was I hardly know—gipsies perhaps, tramps certainly, without relatives, without friends, and both died before I knew anything. No kinsfolk have ever sought me out and claimed relationship. I cannot tell, if I became your wife and rich, what they might do, supposing there are any—swarm round and pester me and you for money. Consider that you have been a wanderer, and have formed no ties in your neighbourhood. It would be well now for you to attach to you a woman who is well connected in your neighbourhood, and so through her you would be drawn into the county life of the families about Liskeard, whereas if you take me you will never be other than an alien to it, tolerated by it, not absorbed into it.'

'I have no particular eagerness to be absorbed into that dull and narrow circle.'

'You have to live as country squire, associate with men of the same class, and ought to be, in mind and feeling, in touch with it.'

'That I can never be. I have seen the world, been in all kinds of places and all sorts of society, and cannot cramp my thoughts and interests to the miserable pettinesses that occupy

their attention. Come, Theresa, take me. Upon my soul I love and admire you as I do no other woman in the world. I believe with faith unquestioning that I shall be happy with you, and, so help me God, I will do my best to deserve your regard and make you a happy woman.'

He put out his hand towards her. His sincerity was not to be mistaken. His voice trembled as he spoke.

Then the curtains at the window were sharply drawn aside, and Mrs. Boxholder appeared.

'Oh!' said that lady. 'Oh, indeed!'

The injudicious exclamation of Lady Duff-Duff had been heard, and had drawn attention to the fact that Mr. Curgenven and Rose had retired into the conservatory.

'Who is that strange gentleman?' asked Sir Archibald of a lady near him.

'A great Cornish squire, I believe,' she replied.

'Bless me, you don't say so! I thought by his looks he was an American.'

Some parties, who had not heard what was said or gave it no heed, were for sauntering into the lighted conservatory, but were intercepted by Mrs. Boxholder.

'I think—you will excuse me—I think you had better not. Much vapour rises from the moistened soil at night, and as you seem heated, it might give you a chill, you see, dear Mary

Grainger. I care for you as a mother. I cannot forget how unwell you have been.' Then, whilst engaged in conversation with Sir Archibald, she saw her husband make for the conservatory. At once she broke off what she was saying and pursued him.

'Drumduskie! what are you about?'

'My dear, there is one of the lamps in the conservatory smoking. I am going to turn it down.'

'Let it smoke. Don't you know what is going on there?'

'No, my dear, only smuts falling.'

'Smuts! Really you are too bad. Why Rose is receiving an offer.'

'Well, here she comes,' said Mr. Boxholder; 'not much concerned, I take it.'

As he spoke his eldest daughter entered from the hall-door, and her mother at once hastened to her.

'Well, dear, is all settled?'

'I had torn my dress out of the gathers,' answered Rose; 'that is, Mr. Curgenven did it. So I have been to Louisa to run it up. I have been as quick as I could.'

'But where is Mr. Percival?'

'In the school-room.'

'Did you leave him there?'

'Yes, mamma.'

'Well, my dear, have you accepted him?'

'I do not understand, mamma.'

'Hush! every one is listening.'

Mrs. Boxholder was puzzled. She saw that eyes were fixed on her and Rose, and that conversation had flagged. Every one, who knew or suspected that a proposal had been made, was intent to learn how it had been received.

Rose, quite unconscious of this, in the lull in the hum of voices said, so that every one heard: 'Mr. Curgenven is in the school-room, mamma; he asked me to take him there. He wanted to see and have a talk with the governess.'

Mrs. Boxholder's colour fell, but, recovering herself, she said hastily, 'Yes, he has a message for her from Mr. Pamphlet. But really he must not desert us; I'll fetch him back.'

So the lady, with fluttering heart and rising anger, swept along the conservatory, entered the school-room through the half-open window, drew back the curtains, and saw Mr. Percival Curgenven taking the hand of Theresa. He rose at once, so did Theresa.

'Allow me,' said Percival, 'to thank you, Mrs. Boxholder, for your kindness and courtesy shown during the weeks she has been with you to one who will shortly be Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.'

CHAPTER VIII.

A BROKEN BREAKFAST.

THE dowager Mrs. Curgenven was at breakfast with her father and daughter. She had supplied the first wants of both from the coffee-pot, and, before touching the bacon on her plate, she opened her letters.

Mr. Pamphlet, looking up at an exclamation that had escaped his daughter's lips, was surprised and startled to see her face drawn with an expression unusual, that implied physical or mental pain. Her hands had dropped on the table and the letter had fallen to the ground.

'Jane, what is it?'

Mrs. Curgenven tried to rise, then sank back in her chair again.

'Bless me! not a stroke?' asked Mr. Pamphlet.

Jane Curgenven stooped, picked up the letter, and passed it across the table to her father.

Mr. Pamphlet perused it without much emotion. It was from Mrs. Boxholder. It related how that Mr. Curgenven had called at Drumduskie, how that she, believing in the hint thrown out by her sister, had invited him to dinner, how that, instead of paying attention to Rose and asking for her hand, he had proposed to the governess. It went on to say that she —Mrs. Boxholder—had immediately ordered Mrs. Lambert, as an insolent, designing woman, who had used her house as a trap in which to ensnare and capture a man of means, to quit the house, and how that she believed that this woman was to be married forthwith to Mr. Curgenven. 'I wish you joy, my dear Jane,' said Mrs. Boxholder in conclusion; 'I heartily wish you joy of your new squiress—a crafty, speculating, cunning, deceitful hussy, with no breeding, no manners, no morals, no talents.'

The rector, having read the letter, folded it, then pushed his cup towards Mrs. Curgenven, and said, in even tones: 'Half, please, and not quite so sweet as the last.'

His daughter thrust back her chair from the table.

'Really, papa!' she exclaimed, then rose and left the room.

'I'm afraid your mother is somewhat out of sorts,' said Mr. Pamphlet to Alice, who was alarmed. 'You need not be uneasy, it will pass. She wishes to be alone.'

'But she has had no breakfast,' said the girl.

'My dear, she has had a good deal more than she can digest,' answered the rector. 'Will you half fill my cup, and not too sweet, please?'

When the Rev. Mr. Pamphlet had finished his breakfast he leisurely retired to his study, where he unfolded his newspaper and prepared to read it, when the door was opened and his daughter entered.

'Really, papa!' said Mrs. Curgenven, 'how could you? how could you?'

'Could what, my dear?'

'How could you pass your cup for more coffee, and concern yourself about the sugar, after reading such a letter, learning such news?'

'I am not sure that this is not the best thing that could have happened,' said the rector, folding his paper so as to be able to get at the telegrams.

'The best thing that could have happened, papa! Do you know that this abandoned creature will become Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven?'

'Why not, dear?'

'Why? For a thousand reasons. She is not a fit person to succeed *me*. She is not a fit person to be at the head of the parish, to associate with the gentlefolks round, to bear the

name of Curgenven. *She*——' Jane quivered with indignation and wrath.

'My dear,' said the rector with composure, 'you must consider that she is, and was, Mrs. Curgenven. About that no moral, as well as no legal, doubt can remain.'

'I dispute it altogether.'

'But Physic has had properly attested extracts made from the register of the Embassy at Naples.'

'Registers have been tampered with before now.'

'We have not the slightest grounds for supposing this to have been done in the case of Lambert and——'

'That creature! I do not care what the register may say. It was no marriage. I do not believe it was anything but a joke.'

'It could not be a joke. There are more formalities to be gone through for a marriage at an Embassy than in England.'

'That vile creature may not have been of age.'

'Of that we have no proof.'

'I will not believe it. You, papa, speak of moral and legal proof. Legal proof does not concern me; legality and right are not synonymous terms. How often has the wrong person been accused and sentenced and hung for a murder!—all in the course of law. Legality does not count with me. And as for moral certainty—that I have most unshaken. Why,

papa, have you considered that if the abominable conspiracy between this creature and Physic were based on facts, that *I* —I, your daughter—*I* who have been so many years Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven—would turn out to have been no better than I should be, not a respectable person, and Alice—Alice, my daughter, never ought to have been at all? Good gracious me!' Mrs. Curgenven took the paper impatiently from her father's hand and began to fan herself with it. 'A moral impossibility! I am as certain, as positive, that I have been perfectly respectable, and everything that I ought to have been, as that there is a heaven above my head and an earth beneath my feet, and that I am Mrs. Curgenven, the dowager, the widow, the legitimate widow of Captain Lambert.'

'You beg the question throughout.'

'I do not admit it to be a question.'

'Now, my dear, do not become hot and extravagant.'

'I am not hot and extravagant, but I cannot understand your pushing up your cup for coffee, and wanting less sugar, when the character of your daughter and the legitimacy of your grandchild were at stake.'

'They were not at stake, Jane; do be reasonable. Whatever that story about Lambert's marriage may have been in reality, the only menace to you was from that person who claimed to have been Lambert's wife.'

'She never was his wife.'

'Never mind that. Now she is about to become Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven, to occupy a position which she says ought to have been hers for the last nineteen years. She gains everything she has desired.'

'It is monstrous that she—such a Thing as she—should get her way.'

'She has got it, and will be content. Every occasion for her to rake up that miserable old story is taken from her.'

'She will do it to spite me.'

'Not unless you drive her to do so by unreasoning impatience and resentment.'

'Resentment indeed!' Mrs. Curgenven tossed her head; 'as if I could feel any such emotion as resentment towards such a despicable, abandoned scum of womanhood as that!'

'My dear, your words are strong.'

'Not a particle too strong.'

'I hope you will not show any ill-feeling towards her. You are not justified in pronouncing on her moral character without knowledge.'

'Oh, I know!'

'What do you know against her?'

'Never mind; I do know.'

'And I insist on being told what it is you have learned that has not reached me.'

'She has been on the stage.'

'Well; she had to earn her livelihood.'

'Every one knows what the stage means, and in America too!'

'You are judging wickedly and cruelly.'

'I know quite enough. The very fact that she pretends to have been Lambert's wife is in itself condemnation. If that were not enough, is it not fatal to her moral character that she should pounce down on Percival and devour him?'

'Really, Jane, this is indeed unreasonable. You yourself wanted to secure Percival for Rose.'

'Oh, there is no harm in that.'

'Then where is there the harm in this lady taking him?'

'Lady! Papa, how can you speak of her by such a term? She is no lady, never was, and never can be.'

'Instead of her pouncing down on Percival, it seems to me that Percival has taken a long flight, hovered over Drumduskie, and swooped down on her.'

'She summoned him there.'

'How do you know?'

'I am morally sure of it. Percival is a fool, and she is clever as the evil one himself.'

'Anyhow,' said the rector, 'give me my paper. The thing is done, or will very soon be done. Percival has made his choice, and this person will very shortly be here, installed in the Manor-House as Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.'

'You are not going to be so wicked as to marry them?'

'I am not asked. I presume they will be married in Edinburgh or in London, and come on here after the wedding or after the honeymoon. You will have to compose yourself to receive them.'

'I never will receive her. I never will go near the house. I don't think I will go to church if she dares to show her brazen face within the sacred walls.'

'My dear Jane, you must not offend Percival or her. Remember there are all the clubs in the parish, there is the National School, there is the Institute, the Parochial Library, there are the mission woman and the Scripture reader, the choir, the Band of Hope, Anglo-Israel—all dependent in the main on the subscriptions from Curgenven House. I cannot afford to be on bad terms with Percival, and that without reason. Besides, it always has a bad look if the rector and the squire do not pull together; and, as a matter of course, all the blame is thrown on the former. It stands in the way of ministerial work, my dear Jane——'

Then in at the door burst Justinian, with flaming cheeks and glittering eyes.

'Mr. Pamphlet—Aunt Jane'—Mrs. Curgenven was not his aunt, but the boy had been allowed so to designate her—'I have had a letter from the gov. Oh, such dreadful things! He's going to be married. It is a shame; and I always thought he loved my mother so. And it is to her who was thrown out of the gig and broke her collar-bone. I don't say but she's not such a bad lot, only now she'll be sticking herself between us, and the boss and I will never be so chummy as we have been.' His voice shook, tears were forming in his eyes.

'It is infamous! That woman will disgrace your father and the place,' said Mrs. Curgenven.

'Be silent, Jane. I will not permit this.' The rector stood up, he was roused and angry. Jane drew back with a sullen look in her countenance.

'My boy,' said Mr. Pamphlet, 'your father has a perfect right to choose, and has no doubt made the best choice he could—one that will suit him. You must not blame him.'

'It will spoil my happiness. The governor and I were always together.'

'It will have this good in it for you, that now you will go to school.'

'I am too old for that.'

'Then to a private tutor.'

'I should not mind. I shall be glad to be away. I cannot bear to think of my father married, and she will very likely turn his heart away from me.'

Mrs. Curgenven was about to speak, but her father raised his hand in caution.

'My dear Justin, in such a house as Curgenven there must be a mistress. Your father could not get on without a wife to manage for him. Now, as you know, everything is in confusion, the servants leaving, and pillaging right and left.'

'Let him pay a woman to be his housekeeper. But to give me another mother is too bad.'

'No woman would look after his and your interests like one who is his wife. Your father cannot in his present position consult your fancies only, but what is best for the place, for himself, and for you. Now, Justin, I am quite sure that were he alone here, unassisted, he would become desperate.'

'I don't know about that. She shall never be a mother to me.'

'You will show respect to her as your father's wife.'

Justinian shrugged his shoulders.

Then arrived Mr. Physic.

'So, sir,' said the agent, 'you have heard the news?

Wonderful, is it not? Never expected that. I have had a letter from Mr. Curgenven, and he desires that the bells should be rung, of course with your permission, to welcome him and his bride when they arrive.'

'When will that be?'

'In a week.'

'Papa,' said Mrs. Curgenven, 'you never will allow that!' Her colour rose. 'It will be a desecration of the bells.'

'I am the best judge of that, Jane,' said her father gravely. 'Indeed I shall. It would be remarked were the bells not to be rung. When Percival came into residence, with good feeling and kindly thought for us, either the ringers did not attempt to give him a peal or he forbade it. Now that he returns with a wife, with Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven, of course I shall allow the bells to be rung. You may write and say so, Physic. It would be a gross and unpardonable offence against good manners and against policy to refuse them on such an occasion.'

'Quite so. Hear, hear!' said Physic. 'Clever, too, weren't she, to catch the great prize, before any other anglers had their rods out?'

'You will be pleased to remember his son is present,' said the rector haughtily.

'Bless me, so he is. How are you, young squire?'

Justinian did not like the agent, and he responded with curtness that was short courtesy.

'Mr. Physic,' said Mrs. Curgenven, 'will you permit me a word in the garden with you?'

'Certainly, madam,' and with a bow he held the door as she swept out of the room.

CHAPTER IX.

A SECOND DISAPPOINTMENT.

'If I may trouble you,' said Mrs. Curgenven with a stiff bend and an imperious wave of her hand in the direction of the garden—that is to say, the walled rose-garden. A country parsonage is not infrequently made sweet and lovely by its old-fashioned garden. The parson has not at his command sufficient glass and a sufficiently skilled gardener to inflict on him the fashionable bedded-out uniformity. He has to content himself with the old favourite flowers that were the delight of his predecessors, growing without more attention than occasional weeding and thinning out; flowers that have made the garden their own, consider the beds as their own, and will not be displaced for newer and more brilliant introductions; flowers robust in growth and hardy in constitution, exhaling odour as of the Spice Isles, not leaving the soil bare and barren for nine months and covering it for three, but coming

and going in wondrous order, a great variety, changing kaleidoscopically every week, in winter represented by Christmas roses and aralias, and a timid cheiranthus and anemone. And the garden wall is covered with the old monthly rose, over which the laundry-maid empties the soapsuds every week, and which, in return, flowers abundantly till the midst of January.

Into such a garden as this Mrs. Curgenven introduced Mr. Physic. It possessed one long walk under a wall that faced south, against which grew fig trees, yellow jessamine, and traveller's joy. Under the wall was a narrow bed in which at this time were beautiful pink Guernsey lilies and a border of autumn colchicum.

'Now, then,' said Mrs. Curgenven, 'what do you think of this affair? Is there no way of stopping it? Can you not find that this wretched woman has a husband alive?'

'I cannot do that, madam. I am sorry, but what can I do?'

'It is not my place to say what you are to do. You are a lawyer, and I suppose there are some means of preventing Mr. Curgenven from making a fool of himself and covering the family with discredit.'

'Indeed, I know of no way.'

'But it is such a terrible thing; that person is no more fit

to be in Curgenven than is Esther Morideg. No neighbours will call. She will not be received into any decent house. It will be intolerable—living so near, having her occupying my rooms, sitting in my chair, having the key to my store-room. It is contamination to think of it.' Then sharply turning on Physic she asked: 'About her past history, what have you learned?'

'Very little. I never dreamed of her becoming the wife of Mr. Percival. All *I* know about her concerns the marriage. That I did investigate. I made the requisite inquiries at Naples, and ascertained that she really had married Mr. Lambert Curgenven when he was a young lieutenant. There can be no doubt about the case. There is a family resident at Salerno, I understand, that was at Naples at the time and they remember the circumstances. I believe the chaplain who married them is now incumbent of a parish in the east of England. I am sorry to have to assure you that all doubts as to the fact of the marriage are at an end. That is all I know.'

'Yes, you fancy you have established it. But have you communicated with this incumbent in the east of England, and this family at Salerno?'

'I have not written to the latter, but to the former I have.'

'I do not believe in this creature being the same person.

She has not been confronted with any of those who were at the pretended marriage. How can you say she is not an impostor, who, having heard of the affair, takes on herself the *rôle* of being the neglected, ill-used wife?'

'That view is possible, but it is easily dispelled. If need arise for establishing the identity it can, no doubt, be done, and what is questioned made quite certain.'

'"No doubt!" "quite certain!" You are all in league against me. I *do* doubt. I am *not* certain, and till all is so clear that every line of it can be read I will not believe, in the first place, in the marriage; and then, even suppose there were this marriage, that the woman who has been here and has now entangled Mr. Percival in her net is the same person who secured Lambert—I mean my husband. If that woman comes here I do not care where I go, what I do; I will not remain in the same place with her.'

'So confess defeat,' said Physic with a smile.

'What do you say? Confess defeat? You think it will be so? Rather than that I will stay and confront her. Oh, would to Heaven!—but no, I must not say that. By the way, there was a scandal—I heard you say something about it—as the reason why Lambert, supposing there were truth in the story of the marriage, deserted her.'

'Nothing could be proved.'

'But a great deal may be proved. There is no smoke without fire.'

They had reached the end of the long walk. Then both turned.

Physic, speaking slowly, asked: 'But if it be so unpleasant to you, madam, to have the lady in this place, would you not do your utmost to force her to quit it?'

'Of course I would. But what can I do?'

'You must understand that I throw out a suggestion only. There was—there may be still—a will in existence executed by the late Captain Curgenven, that left everything to you in trust for Miss Alice.'

'There is! Where is it?'

'That is more than I can say. Some parties interested in the matter have it. I do not say I have seen it. If that will were produced, then Mr. Percival and his new missus would be bundled neck and crop out of Curgenven, and you would be reinstated as mistress of the house.'

Mrs. Curgenven drew a long breath and walked more uprightly than before. 'There is such a will! It must be produced. I knew that Lambert had provided for us.'

'If this will could be found it would crush Mrs. Percival, who has married the new squire for his wealth and position, and has rejected others, I dare say, for him.'

'Where is this will?'

'You do not suppose that I have it?'

'Of course not, or you would have proved it for us.'

'I have been sounded relative to it by interested persons who have the will. I believe that there is no likelihood of their surrendering it unless well paid for so doing.'

'Oh, they shall be paid.'

'They will not be content with a small sum. What do you now get out of the estate? Nothing.'

'Nothing by law, I suppose; but Percival has assured me that I shall be treated liberally.'

'Yes, he will give you alms. But what if you could establish your right and that of your child to Curgenven? What if, when the bride arrives and expects to be received with bells ringing, and triumphal arches, and cheers of "Welcome!" from the tenantry, and the path flower-strewn by the school-children—the children of your class, madam—she finds, instead, that she has not any right to descend at the steps, and that you can slam the door in her face?'

'I would give a great deal to be able to do this,' said Mrs. Curgenven with heightened colour.

'The difference to you, ma'am, would be that of four thousand a year and nothing. Of course the parties who pretend to have the will in their hands are well aware of that, and

therefore will not be content with less than a thousand pounds for the testament.'

'A thousand pounds! Surely I can obtain a warrant or something of the sort to force them to give up the will?'

'If you knew who they were.'

'But you know.'

'No. I am approached through a third party. They are cunning dogs, very cunning, and are aware of the danger. It will require negotiation in a very circuitous manner to obtain the document, so that no one may be compromised. But I think it can be done for the sum I named.'

'It is an impossible sum.'

'It might, perhaps, be arranged to be paid in two instalments. I am not sure, I merely suggest this as possible.'

'I don't believe it could be enforced. Such an agreement must be illegal. It is blackmail.'

'No doubt it is, but it is the only way by which this will can be got back into our hands. There are great rascals in the world, and one must at times submit to their rascality to get at one's rights.'

Mrs. Curgenven considered.

It would be a satisfaction to be back in the Manor-House. She had felt cramped and oppressed within the narrow walls and under the low ceilings of the Parsonage. She had missed

her conservatories, her flowers and fruit, but, above all, the deference that had been paid her as squiress and queen of Curgenven. A parlour-maid, a housemaid, and a cook formed the establishment at the rectory, and she liked to be waited on by liveried servant-men and a butler. She could not now call out her carriage and pair, but must drive in a little buggy with her father, and the clerical cob was a slow trotter that walked up all the hills and down as well. But comforts, luxuries, deferences weighed light with her against the overwhelming desire to exclude that woman, Theresa, from the great house, from occupying that position which had once been hers. She could not reconcile her mind to remaining in the place and seeing this woman in the great house, reigning in her stead, occuping the manorial pew in the church, taking precedence of her in social life, receiving letters addressed 'Mrs. Curgenven,' whereas she must sink to be the dowager Mrs. Curgenven.

It really would be worth a thousand pounds to escape such a miserable condition of affairs, such daily annoyance, such bitter humiliation to her pride. Her father, she knew, would stoop to be friendly to this person because of the subscriptions to the parochial organization which he could not do without.

'I suppose this will of which you speak,' said Jane, throwing up her head, 'acknowledges my right to be Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven?'

'Well, no,' answered the agent with some hesitation; 'you see that would spoil everything. The will, I am told, mentions you as Jane Pamphlet, commonly known as Jane Curgenven.'

'What! proclaim me a—something I will not even name?'

'It need never be known.'

'But if the will be proved it will be known.'

'It will not be talked of, you may be sure, by the officials at Somerset House; they have other things to think of.'

'But any one may pay a shilling and read it—read in it that I—I, Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven, have not been the wife of Captain Curgenven, and that my child has no right to her father's name. Heaven forbid! There is no such will. Such a will never could have been drawn up by my husband. He dared not have done it. It is an impudent forgery; it is a forgery by designing, unprincipled persons who seek to make capital out of my difficulties. No, in Heaven's name, not one penny will I give for such a will. It is no genuine will! What a world of fraud and wickedness we inhabit! Why, such a document was designed to make out my husband to be one of the greatest scoundrels that ever lived. He was thoughtless and had his weaknesses, but he was a man of honour and a gentleman. No, emphatically No. I will none of it.'

Mr. Physic drove back to the market town that day with his mind not on his cob.

He had met with two rebuffs, first from Mr. Percival Curgenven and then, that day, from Mrs. Jane. Neither would pay for what he had in his possession. Percival was ready to accept the consequences should the will be produced. Jane was unwilling to have it produced, even that it should secure her a future of comfort and a position of dignity. Physic had reckoned on Percival falling at once under the inducement he held out to him of having the document destroyed that would expel him from Curgenven. Physic had thought it well to let the globe-trotter taste the pleasures of rank and wealth before he warned him of the precariousness of his position. But, Percival, rolling stone though he had been, improvident, without tenacity of purpose, without persistency in any course, had his own ideas of what was right and honourable, and there was that in the manner in which he had cast from him the solicitations of the agent which convinced the latter that the squire was sincere in his resolve to do nothing which was not above-board.

'He's a fool,' muttered Physic; 'he don't know which side his bread is buttered; or, I shouldn't wonder if he don't care particular for butter at all, he's gone on so long on dry bread.'

As for Mrs. Jane Curgenven's objection, he could understand that better than he could the refusal of Percival.

'She's 'tarnation proud, that she is. She'd rather be Mrs. Curgenven on twopence-ha'penny than take thousands and have it known she was no missus at all.'

He drove on with his chin on his breast and his brows knit.

'There's naught for it,' said he. 'I must try it on with the new missus.'

Then he laughed.

'Well, now,' said he, 'it was just hereabouts that she caught me across the back of my hand with the reins. I'll make her smart for the smart she then gave me. What's she to become Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven? She's no better than an adventuress. She'll have no scruples. She'll know the vally of butter. She'll do everything she can not to have it scraped off with a rusty knife.'

He shook his head. 'She's a deep 'un,' said he, 'to go and refuse me, as she did, with such airs too—she who hadn't a farthing to bless herself with! But she had her eye on Percival, and he has caught hers. A clever rogue! But she shall find me cleverer than she is. She thinks, does she, that she's netted Curgenven, with its park and its mansion, and the family plate and jewels, and the presentation of the rectory, and four thousand a year, and moorland where there

be mines that, if properly managed, would double the income? She thinks she has got all that by making eyes and saying "Yes," does she? Then, by Ginger, she's mistaken! I have to be reckoned with. If she will eat butter, she must pay for it—and pay me.'

CHAPTER X.

A RUINED HOME.

JUSTINIAN walked with flushed cheek to the rectory. His lips were dry, and he felt feverish and restless. He had not slept much the previous night—according to his own account not at all, but that was an exaggeration into which others liable to wakefulness fall. His father was to return that day, bringing with him the new wife and mistress of Curgenven. That she should be mistress of Curgenven concerned Justinian little, but that his father should have taken to him a companion who would thenceforth be nearer and dearer to him than he, his son, was—that concerned the boy greatly, and made him very unhappy. He had been with his father in all occupations and amusements, had had hardly a companion of his own age—certainly none whom he loved to be with so much as his father, who had the carelessness and caprice of a child in him in his mature years, who entered with zest into

all sports, and had as great an aversion as had the boy to all serious work.

Justinian felt himself cast aside, and he was bitter at heart against the woman who had supplanted him. If the truth must be told, the lad had cried during the night, but he hardly admitted to himself that he had been guilty of such weakness.

He could not amuse himself in the house or in the grounds. On all sides were tokens of preparation for the reception of the new Mrs. Curgenven—servants dusting and polishing, gardeners examining borders and weeding drives. So he went to the rectory to divert his thoughts.

But Alice was engaged at her music with a master, and must not be disturbed. Mrs. Jane Curgenven could not trust herself to speak more than a few words with the lonely boy ; she felt with him and for him, but had sufficient discretion and good feeling not to give vent before him to what she thought. The reverend the rector was due at the school to teach the children nothing definite that could do them good in this world or the next in the most sounding words. Mr. Pamphlet flattered himself and informed all the world that no Dissenter ever withdrew a child from the class for religious teaching in the Curgenven school. This was not, however, altogether wonderful, as the teaching of the rector was so

absolutely colourless that not a prism could polarize it and resolve it to definite tints.

Justinian, finding that he was not wanted or welcome at the rectory, left it and wandered in the direction of the moors. He would go there—away from every living man, lie in the sun and fret over his trouble alone.

But hardly had he entered the lane that led out on the moors than he encountered a party of men armed with picks and crowbars, headed by Mr. Physic, all, save their leader, smoking and laughing and talking.

Physic addressed some passing observation to Justinian, which he acknowledged with a nod, and then pushed on. He disliked the agent, and the observation made was not one to please him; it referred to his 'new mamma.'

No sooner was the young fellow on the moor than his arm was caught by Esther; she was in great agitation, and her eyes were full of tears.

'They've a-done it,' she said. 'Oh, Master Justinian! do'y come now and see.'

'What is it, Esther?'

'They've a been a-muzzling' (knocking down) 'the house. There was a core o' men here—a foothy' (daring) 'lot they was. And vayther, he be like as one maazed.'

'Your father back!'

'Yes, I reckon, a' far as his body can be, but not his mind. He ain't the same man. Come along, soas!'

Justinian found it hard to keep up with the girl, who ran before him, and turned occasionally to see that he was following, and to hurry him forward.

On reaching Tolmenna Justinian found that it was completely wrecked. The wretched furniture had been taken out of the cottage and cast in a heap on the turf or piled up, and then roof and walls had been destroyed by the workmen engaged by Mr. Physic. The chimney stood, and some fragments of wall; but what had at one time been the room in which the family had lived was reduced to an accumulation of turf, rafter, and stone, thrown together. To restore the cottage so as to be habitable was not possible.

Amidst his furniture sat, in a stupefied and listless mood, the owner of the ruined cottage, the man who had once knocked down Physic—himself a greater wreck than his house.

The old moor-man, accustomed to spend his days abroad in the open air, traversing the hillsides, unrestrained by hedge where there was not a road, not even a path, asking no man's leave to go where he had a mind, consulting no will save his own as to what he should do, at an advanced period of life had been suddenly translated to a prison, and every condition of

existence had been reversed. Unable to endure the change, his mind had given way. He had been released and had returned home with his brain benumbed, and if aught further had been needed to complete his stultification, it was to have his house gutted and then destroyed before his eyes. He made no resistance. He looked on with dazed eyes, and where he had sunk down when driven forth there he remained.

Meanwhile the old woman had gone off in search of some place of refuge. Warning enough had been given by Physic that he intended to dislodge his tenants, but the threat had been disregarded, and no provision made by them against the day when they would be homeless.

With his wonted impetuosity, and his generous feelings roused, Justinian went up to the old man, saying: 'It is a shame! I'll see my father about it.'

'This bain't his land,' answered the moor-man.

'No; but he has plenty of houses. I will see that you have one.'

Old Morideg shook his grey head.

'I were born and bred on the moor,' said he. 'Your father ha'n't got any houses there, and I can't live where I'm not free. No, young squire.' Again he shook his head. 'It be my fault, it be. To every man comes once his chance, and if

he put it from him or take hold wi' half a heart, then he never gets his chance again.'

'But what chance came to you?'

'See,' said Morideg, extending his open hand to the ruins of his house. 'Thickey house 'ud been standing as good as iver if I'd 'a took my chance when the Lord gave him to me.' After a pause and a blow against his grey head: 'Us be a pass'l o' ungrateful creeturs, as is blind to what us ought to do till it be too late. Thickey house—the Lord put the chance bevoor me, and I didn't lay hold wi' both hands.'

'But what chance did Heaven give you?'

'To knack 'n on the head, stone dead, man,' answered Morideg.

'To knock whom?'

'Why, Lawyer Physic, for sure. Who else could I mean? I just gave 'n a fiffery sort o' a clout, but I shu'd 'a given he a good blow as 'ud 'a skat his neddick' (broken his neck), 'and then thickey house 'ud 'a been standing still.'

'But,' said Justinian, startled at the self-reproach of the old man, 'if you had killed Mr. Physic you'd have swung for it.'

'I? Who'd ha' swung me?'

'You'd have been caught and sent to prison, tried, and hung.'

'No, they'd ne'er 'a caught me on these moors.'

'Well, anyhow, you could not have come back to the house.'

'Maybe. I don't deny that. But, then, some day or other I mun leave 'n for good and all. It ain't I as matters, it's the house. There's no house now for my old woman nor for Esther. If I'd 'a done for Physic he'd not ha' been able to 'a muzzled it all down from the strick to the plancheon' (from the thatching to the floor), 'as he hev a-done. And then there'd be a home for Esther. But I never proper laid ho'd o' the chance the Lord gev me. There's the unfort'nate thing, and now I mun suffer for it.' He rubbed his head. 'Does Physic think to find ball' (open a mine) 'here where the old men never made costeening' (exploring) 'pits? Every one who ain't a fool knows that there be no tin where no costeening and no streaming hev been tried. The old men waren't fools. He who goes after tin elsewhere, he's sure to go wrong.'

The wife came up. She had been to a farm under Trewortha Tor, and had obtained permission for her to move with Roger and her grand-daughter for a while into an old building on the further side of the stream—a building long used as a cowhouse or stable, which had a roof to keep the interior dry, but was without window or chimney. Mrs. Morideg knew very well that if she asked for anything it would not be

denied her, so great was the fear in which she was held; at the same time she was aware that she and her family would be unwelcome tenants, and she had therefore asked for the use of the shed only till such time as a fresh cottage could be erected to accommodate her party and contain her few sticks of furniture.

Justinian again offered one of his father's cottages, but the Moridegs refused it again. They could not breathe, they could not be happy, in the midst of hedges, among trees, on cultivated land. Then he cheerfully and good-humouredly assisted them in the transport of their goods. The farmer of Trewortha had sent some of his men and a rude cart, but no crockery could be placed on wheels where there was not a road, only a track over the moor, and where the cart bounced and lurched at every moment in such a manner that it was wondrous that it did not itself go to pieces.

The place fixed on by Mrs. Morideg for a temporary dwelling was further removed from civilization, deeper in the depths of the wilderness than where the old hut had stood. There is a little stream called the Withy Brook that rises in a broad basin under the Cheesewring and Boarrah Tors, wild, but devoid of remarkable beauty. But a ridge of granite runs out from the east and contracts the valley, and on passing this a scene of singular desolation and beauty is disclosed. Kilmar,

a granite mountain of noble proportions, towers up in queenly majesty above a wide marsh into which the Withy Brook and several other streams from converging glens plunge and disappear. The grey level surface of the marsh forms a triangle and covers what was once a lake, and is now impassable by the foot of man. Finally, the united streams break their way over a step of granite, and fall in cascade into the river Lynher. Tradition says that a city (Tresillan) stood at the margin of the choked lake, that was a market town before Launceston and Liskeard were other than breezy down; and, strange to say, the banks and slopes from the hills are strewn with ruins of ancient dwellings and enclosures of unknown age, the remains of an unknown people whose flint weapons are turned up by the spade and share wherever a farmer extends the area of cultivated land.

'Do you see?' said Esther, pointing to the wild expanse; 'now you can understand what vayther and I said, as how none could ever catch him or me if us chose to go on the moors, and the police were after us. Why, I reckon there's none but I as know how to cross Trewortha and Tresillan marshes. There's but one way, and there's not another could do it. If he tried he'd go in and never rise again. But none would be that venturesome to try it.'

The wind was blowing from the south-east. The two

young people stood on high ground, looking down on the desolate surface of the marsh.

'Hark!' said Esther. 'I reckon I hear bells. For sure it be the Curgenven bells.'

Justinian's heart contracted.

'My father has come home,' he said, 'bringing with him a new mother for me, and I feel like one banished from home—much as do you, Esther.'

The tears rose in Justinian's eyes, and gall embittered his heart. He bit his fingers to conceal the tremor of his lips, and then waving one hand bade Esther begone, with the promise that he would follow in a few minutes.

She accepted the dismissal and ran down the hill. She was wanted in her new home.

If it had not been that his father was bringing a new wife with him to Curgenven, Justinian would have been there to welcome him—nay, he would have run along the road to forestall his arrival. But now, as the boy said to himself, he would not be required. His father would not miss him. He would be so full of care and love for this woman that he would have no thought to spare for his son. He would show her the house, the gallery with the paintings and cabinets and tapestry, the family portraits, the conservatory, the garden. No, Justinian believed he would not be missed; if his father

gave him a thought it would be mixed with self-congratulations that the lad was not about the place when he brought home his bride.

'I hate that woman,' muttered he, 'and so does Aunt Jane. I shan't go home till nightfall, and then I'll just creep up to my room and be seen of none. I don't want to meet her. And—I'll go to school or college, or to sea—anywhere to be away from what is no longer a home to me.'

CHAPTER XI.

TAKE CARE!

The day was rapidly closing in. The tidings that the Tolmenna cottage had been unroofed and dismantled by Physic and a party of workmen had spread through the neighbourhood. Physic was no favourite, although the Moridegs were objects of mistrust rather than of favour, yet the fact that they were driven out of home—a home that had been theirs for three generations, a house that had been built by Roger's father—roused general sympathy, and when work was over many labourers came to volunteer their assistance to remove furniture and make habitable the cattle-shed that had been given up to the family for a temporary shelter. Happily no bullocks had been housed in the shed for a couple of years, so that it was in passably clean condition. But it was deficient in chimney, and the smoke escaped as best it could, and where

it could. Fern and moss were collected and littered on the floor, and with the skill and ingenuity only possessed by men experienced to move great masses of stone, a slap of granite was placed on rollers, and, with crowbars, was easily run in at the door and planted as a hearth.

Good-humour, readiness to help, and mirth prevailed; even old Roger was roused out of his lethargy to share in the work of making the place habitable, and to loudly lament that his opportunity had been lost or neglected. On this string he harped incessantly; it was his one tune.

'Providence her gave us a chance, and us ungrateful creatures puts it aside. If I'd a-knacked Physic on the head wi' a stone, or skat his neddick wi' a stick, then Tolmenna 'ud 'a been standin' now, and 'ud 'a stood on for ages for Esther and her childer-vean' (little children).

'Joe,' said a workman to his fellow, 'I wouldn't be old Physic in a dark lane—nay, anywhere, when Uncle Roger be about wi' his gun, would you?'

'I reckon,' answered the man addressed, 'Physic will be going a bit too far some day, as he'll find to his cost.'

'Happen as will, and who'll be sorry?' observed the first.

The cottage was still without a window, for the farmer who owned the 'linney' objected to a hole being knocked through the walls. 'For sure,' said he, 'if you begin to knock a hole,

all the walls 'll follow.' And Mrs. Morideg observed that none was needed. Sufficient light entered through the door for cooking purposes, and 'for what else, soas! can volks want light?'

Evening had closed, but not darkness, for the moon was at full and shone over the moors, lighting them almost as clear as day, turning the grey moss of Trewortha Marsh into a sheet of silver, so that it looked as if it had reverted to its ancient condition of lake. Far away on a great bank of moor the moon lit up a block of granite that went by the name of the 'Grey Mare,' and made of it as much a landmark by night as by day. One little orange star shone on the moorside from a lone cottage beyond the marsh (Colquite), where lived a solitary squatter.

The number of men had increased about the hovel, and a few women from the nearest farm and its cottages had also come to the spot to assist, or to comment on the proceedings. Justinian signed to Esther to accompany him to a distance from the throng.

'I am hungry,' said he. 'I have been working hard, and have been without food several hours. So have you, and I do not fancy the old folks have much provision. Come with me to "The Chough," Mrs. Penwarden will help. I'll get her to pack a basket with bread and cheese, and any cold meat she can spare; but first of all we must have something to eat

ourselves, or we shall faint. I wish,' said Justinian, throwing up his head, 'that I hadn't spent all the money my father left me, or I would have rewarded the men all round for their help to-day.'

Esther accompanied him after she had searched for, and found, a basket that would serve her purpose among the goods transferred from Tolmenna.

There was frost in the air. The sky was clear, of silvery blue-grey, with here and there a suspicion of stars sparkling, then vanishing; on the granite-serrated crest of Kilmar a faint halo rested, the reflex of the western sky still flushing where the sun had gone down beyond Scilly. A plover uttered its plaintive cry at intervals. No sound of murmuring water reached the ear, as every stream was smothered in Trewortha Marsh.

Esther, whose rude nature, because rude, was responsive to every change in the scenery and atmospheric variation, but who, from her rudeness, could not express her sense of the beauty and solemnity of the scene by any expletives and exclamations, broke out into legend. 'They do say,' said she, 'that is, the ou'd folks, as there was a city over yonder as they ca'd Tresillan. There were a palace there, and a king, wi' a crown o' gould; ay! he wor a wicked sort o' man wi' no love for the poor in him. And they was a-keeping feast i'

Tresillan. 'Twere the day o' the foundin' o' this city, and the king and all his great men and grand ladies wor sitting to table eatin' and drinkin' off dishes o' red gowld. Then there came to the hall a poor beggar-man a' i' rags, and he went up to the table and for the love o' God he asked as the king 'ud gi'e him a bit o' the meat off the dish. But the king he laughed, and sez he: "No, man, I want all for the lords and the ladies." Then he up an' asked for the bones as they had a' picked. "No, man," sez the king, "I want they for the dogs." Then the beggar-man he said as how he were nigh on dead wi' hunger, and he asked if the king 'ud gi'e him the gravy i' the dish. But the king he said, sez he: "Man, that I want for the zoppin' o' my bread." "Then," sez the beggar-man, "gi'e me some o' thickey there crumbs you'm a-crumlin' in your fingers." "For sure I wi'n't," said the king; "I want they to feed the pigeons on the roof." Sure he said it. Then the beggar-man made bowlder still, and he went right on end up to the table, and sez he: "Gi'e me the dish." Thereat, I reckon, there rose a brave laugh from all the lords and ladies, for the dish here were o' red, red gowld. But the king, he were that angered, he up wi' the dish and he throwed her at the beggar-man, and the ou'd man fell down wi' the blood runnin' from his head. And afore he died he ill-wished the king and his castle, and his lords and ladies and servants

all, and all the wicked city, that her shu'd go down un'ergrund, and be a marsh for ever.'

'You don't believe such rubbish, surely?'

'Hearken to the rest. Then the ou'd volks says that ever after there groweth i' the marsh a red sort o' a moss like blid' (blood), 'and there run'th a trickle o' ridom water like blid, and so it ever will in testimony to the same. I've zeed 'n. I've zeed 'n scoores o' times.'

'It's all nonsense,' said Justinian.

'You mun say so. But it's comfort, it be, to us poor folk to know that an ill-wish can do all that, when us be dringed up and trod down by the rich and mighty—such as by thickey king, and such as by Lawyer Physic. For sure sartain, if the ou'd beggar cou'd ill-wish the king and all the city and sink 'em in the marsh, my gran'mother can ill-wish and bring down into the dust that Lawyer Physic; and her'll do it too —no mistake. The Lord haan't gi'en us poor folk much, but he's gi'en us that—and us can do it—leastways gran'mother can, and her will.' After a few steps in silence, Esther continued: 'Folks do say that the red blid 'll rin, and the red moss stained in the blid 'll grow, till the Day o' Judgment, and then the city an' the king an' a' will come up out o' the marsh, an' then the ou'd beggar-man 'll hand up the dish and show his cracken crown and ask for judgment on the king,

but the king 'll argie an' say he's been down in the meshes for hundreds o' hundreds o' years wi' his mouth full of ven water, and if that ain't judgment enough, then some volks be onraysonable, and I don't know nothing more about it.'

'These are old wives' tales,' said Justinian, 'and I don't heed them a bit. Let us talk of something else. I'm sorry to have to go to "The Chough" to get what is wanted, when I might go to Curgenven and take thence what is a hundred times better, but I have my reasons.' He shrugged his shoulders and swung his arms in a devil-may-care fashion, and continued, talking more to himself than to his companion: 'My father has gone and got married, and he's old enough to know better. I don't approve of these goings-on. If he'd had as much good feeling as you could pack into the heart of a mouse he'd have consulted me first. It's been a sneaking proceeding all through, and against my principles; he should have told me like a man what rigs he was up to, and looked me in the face, and not have shammed he was off to Scotland to see if he could find a good salmon river to hire for next spring. Salmon river indeed! I'll go home whistling with my hands in my pockets, as if I didn't care whether he brought home one wife or five hundred, like Solomon. I'll let him understand that I'll not be mothered by any of them.'

He talked with a swagger to hide his own uneasiness and

distress—a distress that broke out in his heart whenever his mind recurred to home. He loved his father so deeply that he could not endure that there should be another intruded to share their love, and probably rob him of the best portion. As he thus spoke in braggart fashion he had forgotten the girl at his side, and thought only of himself and his father. But he came out of the lane upon the open space where stood a tavern, 'The Chough,' frequented by a few quarry and moor men, and by an occasional labourer from one of the farms. None of the usual guests were there this evening; all were engaged in assisting old Roger Morideg into his new cottage, or were looking on and passing their comments or giving their advice.

Justinian went in at the door and entered the low room that was lighted by a pendant oil lamp. He called to the landlady imperiously, told her what he wanted, and asked for some refreshment as speedily as it could be prepared. Then he threw himself on a bench and directed Esther to sit against the wall on the inside of the table opposite him.

Mrs. Penwarden was a tenant of the Curgenven estate, and willing to oblige. She was a hale, honest woman, with fresh colour, who could not only hold her own with her customers, but could turn out a disorderly fellow who had drunk too much and had become quarrelsome.

She looked hard at Esther, who had taken the place indicated, and had planted her bare elbows on the table and rested her chin in her palms. The light from the pendant lamp fell over her tumbled red hair and made dark shadows under her brows and a shade beneath the high and prominent cheekbones. A handsome, daring girl she seemed, whose only law was her own will, and whose will was as free, as vagrant, and at times as furious as the winds that swept the moor.

'I'll do you a rasher o' bacon and some eggs,' said Mrs. Penwarden, 'if you can wait a quarter of an hour.'

'Ay, do. Esther and I have eaten nothing. But first bring us some shandygaff to cool our fiery throats.'

'Have the old folks got in fitty-like?' asked the hostess.

'Pretty well,' answered Justinian. 'There are a score of helpers now. It was just at first there were none.'

Presently, when he could hear the fizzing on the fire of the broiling ham, Justinian rose and left the inn, saying that he would go and listen whether the ringers had tired of making fools of themselves, or whether they were still sounding a peal. 'I'll not go home,' said he, 'till those confounded bells have done.'

Whilst Justinian was intent listening to hear whether the silence were due to a pause or to the ringers having left their work, Mrs. Penwarden entered the room and threw a cloth

over the table with a 'By your leave, Esther. Please lift them elbows a minute.' Then, leaning across the table, she said in a confidential tone: 'Esther, my dear, take care of yourself, and don't'y be made a fool of, like your mother.'

'What of my mother?'

'It's well meant, my dear,' said the good woman, seating herself in the place vacated by Justinian, 'so take it right from me. It don't seem fitty that you—the such as you, a Morideg—should be runnin' wild day and night wi' the young squire, and he a Curgenven.'

'Why not?'

'Why not, soas?' repeated Mrs. Penwarden with a Cornish interjection. 'For the best o' good reasons. If your mother had took a little more care of herself, you'd not be Esther Morideg, but be ca'd after your father and have him to look after you. Don't you be made a fool of for your own sake—no, nor yet for the young squire's sake, neither. He's a good young chap, but if ort were to come wrong 'twixt you and he 'twould be the worst as could hap to 'n for ever after. 'Twould be as a black blot again' his name, and nobody would say a word to 'n, and come nigh Curgenven.'

The girl looked steadily into the landlady's eyes. 'You know nort,' she said. 'He be bound to Miss Alice at the Tolmenna stone, that's fact.'

'No, my dear, don't'y think it. If Miss Alice was to hear what folks say—and they be beginning to talk already, so I bid'y be careful—her'd have nothing more to say to him.'

'Folks never say nothing.'

'Yes, they do; not much, but they be screwing up their eyes wi' looking at you both, and wondering what will come of it all. Do'y think they don't know where he's off to when he goes out on the moor? and a score o' times, when he's not going your way, folks think he is. Take you care, Esther. Your mother may have listened to some fine young gentleman —and he left her and a chil-vean, that is, wi' you—and you're Esther Morideg only.'

'What is that?' asked Justinian, entering. But he did not wait to have his question answered; he threw himself on the bench and said: 'I believe they're tired at last. Now, Mrs. Penwarden, is the rasher ready?' Justinian found Esther in no humour to eat or to speak. He insisted on her taking something, but he could hardly extract a word from her. She answered in monosyllables, and sat with her cheek resting in one hand and the other arm folded across her bosom. She had tucked up her short sleeves whilst at work, and had not lowered them; Justinian could not fail to observe and admire the beautiful moulding of her arms thus exposed. And now that her face was inclined, the light from above

produced less hard shadows, it fell over her rounded cheek, and kindled her hair of copper sheen. By daylight the face lacked delicacy of texture in complexion and evenness of colour, but in the light from the lamp all such imperfections were lost, and Justinian found himself looking with admiration at Esther's beauty. She had her little finger curled over her lower lip; it was between her teeth, and she was biting it. He looked down abashed when he saw that her eyes were intently studying him.

When the basket was packed, Justinian and Esther rose, and he said: 'I'll go with you part way.'

'Nay; I can find my own road, thanky.'

'But I wish to. I shall carry the basket as far as the cross, where our paths separate. You'll not refuse me that, Esther?'

She made no reply, and they went forth into the moonlight. The Curgenven woods lay below, dark as ink in the silvered landscape, and the moonbeams were reflected as a star from the glass of the conservatory. The house itself could not be seen. Its back was towards the rising ground, and it was banked up in rear by noble beeches and sycamores.

Justinian walked in silence beside Esther through the lane which after about a mile led out upon the moor. The solemnity of the night, or some influence which neither understood, weighed on both, and made them indisposed to speak.

They drew in with long breaths the pure air, and the moon cast their shadows in fantastic forms on the hedges of granite blocks that skirted their way.

Presently they reached an ancient cross of moorstone, rudely cut, one of the many similar monuments that abound in Cornwall. It marked a point where lanes diverged at the edge of the common. There Esther stood still. Justinian put down the basket and took both her hands in his. For a moment or two he stood there without speaking, a warm wave rushing through all his veins. Then he drew her towards him and kissed her lips.

Instantly she thrust him away. 'No!' she said. 'Not me—Alice.'

Her bosom heaved, and she gasped for breath.

'No!' she said, and she waved both hands before her, as though weaving some spell in the air. 'No. I wish you well! That is all. I wish you well!' Then she stooped, took up the basket and fled running, tripping over hummocks of furze, then relaxing her pace, and the tears coursed down her cheeks in the moonlight.

Justinian turned when she had disappeared over the hill, and uttered an exclamation. He saw his father!

CHAPTER XII.

A FATHER'S HEART.

THE carriage that brought to Curgenven the newly-married pair passed under a triumphal arch that bore the inscription 'Welcome.' The arch had been set up by order of Mr. Physic, and without zeal by the gardener, who had received notice to quit. The woman at the lodge curtsied, but that was one of the conditions on which she occupied the cottage rent free. The five church bells were ringing, for the men who pulled the ropes expected to receive four shillings apiece for their trouble, as well as drink and cake.

A few villagers along the road to Curgenven had come to their doors and looked at the carriage as it rolled by, but had not waved handkerchiefs and cheered; had, in fact, exhibited no particular marks of interest in, and sympathy with, the event. For Mr. Physic had forgotten to remind the squire that

the tenantry expected on such an occasion to be fed with roast beef, and their thirsty throats moistened with beer, on the terrace or in the avenue, at the expense of the lord of the manor. Mr. Percival had not thought of such a thing, not having been reared in the position of squire. Consequently, the general opinion of the people of Curgenven was that the new squire was 'no gentleman.'

Percival, in ignorance of the dissatisfaction with which he was regarded, yet wondering somewhat at the lack of enthusiasm with which he and his bride were received, had his head out of the carriage-window.

'I wonder where he is?' he asked. 'Theresa, look out on your side. I made sure he would have ridden to meet us, and have trotted back at our side. There he is—no, it is the butcher's boy. Do you fancy that he may have been walking, and we have whirled past without observing him?'

'He has not been on my side of the road,' answered Mrs. Curgenven.

'I hope the dear fellow is not unwell,' said Percival, withdrawing his head. 'But it is odd. It is unprecedented. I counted on his coming to meet us.' Then, after a little rumination, 'Surely he cannot have forgotten the day. He is thoughtless—as I have ever been.'

'There are the bells to remind him,' said Theresa.

'Ah! but he is a scatterbrain. He may think the ringers are practising.'

The carriage drew up at the main entrance to the Manor-House, and when Percival hastily worked at the carriage-door handle to get it open that he might dash out in quest of Justinian, he saw before him only Mr. Physic with a bouquet of hothouse flowers in his hand, and behind him the new domestics he had engaged in the place of those who had taken themselves off.

'I say, Physic, where is my boy?'

Percival had jumped out of the carriage and run up the steps, forgetful of his wife, whom he left to the groom to assist to dismount.

'On the moors, I fancy, sir.'

'He is not ill?'

'Oh dear no; in rude health.'

'Then why is he not here?'

Physic laughed, and then, passing Mr. Percival, stepped to Theresa, offered her the bouquet, and said with a bow and smile, 'Allow me to welcome to her home at last, Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.'

Mr. Percival having reached the hall, found Bathsheba, and at once shook her hand and asked: 'I say, Bath, where is Master Justin?'

The housekeeper replied that she thought Justinian had gone to the rectory, and then with the forwardness of an old servant, said, 'Go and see to the lady, master; the young gentleman will take care of himself.'

Percival accepted the admonition, and hastened to show more attention to his wife. He conducted her into the hall, and showed her up-stairs to her room. Then he ran off to the parsonage to inquire after his son. 'There will be time enough before Theresa is ready for something to eat.'

Percival arrived at the rectory, and rang the front door bell. The maid answered, and he inquired if Justinian were there. She believed not, but would go and inquire. Then Jane Curgenven, hearing the voice of Percival in the hall as she was descending the stairs, came to him and welcomed him graciously. She hoped he was well, and that the fresh pure air of Scotland had done him good; that he had been able to secure a river for salmon-fishing for the ensuing season. No—Justinian was not at the parsonage. He had been there, but had gone away again. She (Jane) believed that he had come to persuade Alice to go a ride with him, but she had been detained by her music-lesson, so that Justinian had been constrained to go without her.

Would Percival come in? Jane was dying to hear about her relatives at Drumduskie. What did he think of the place?

Was he not charmed with the associations? How did he think the girls were looking? And Drumduskie himself; was he as much of a cockney as ever? It was the fashion of her family, out of Scotland, to disparage Mr. Boxholder.

Percival Curgenven would not sit down. He replied that he was going to dine, but that he was impatient to see his son, who carelessly, and without proper consideration, had absented himself. He asked how the boy was.

'Oh,' said Jane, 'he is flourishing. I cannot say that he shows much inclination for anything save sport. You really, Percival, must put him through the mill. With his position he must acquire the rudiments of scholarship. Surely you can spare us a few minutes. I am so anxious to learn your opinion of beautiful Drumduskie, and to hear whether any alterations have been made in the place. I wish you had seen it in spring. You had better come in. No! I don't think you are looking quite yourself. Tired with the journey? Well, it is a long way from town, and the trains do not always fit at Plymouth. It is vexatious to have to wait there when one is tired.'

Percival left the rectory with an oppression on his heart. Not by a word had Jane alluded to his wife. She had ignored his marriage, had addressed him as though he stood on the old footing, and no such person as Theresa had appeared at

Curgenven to change relations. When he was back at the great house he found Physic there still; the agent wished to know whether Percival were satisfied with what had been done, and whether his services were further required.

'You had best stay and dine with us,' said Mr. Curgenven. 'Only *en famille*, of course, and no dressing. My wife and I are both tired and out of spirits, so you can enliven us. I wish Justinian were here. He is not at the parsonage.'

'No, sir,' said the agent; 'I informed you I had met him going to the moor.'

'Did you? I forgot. What is he gone there for?'

Physic laughed. Something in the tone of his laugh jarred the feelings of Percival, and he looked into his face.

'What do you mean, Physic?'

'Well, sir, now you ask me, I may as well tell you. The young fellow goes a great deal too often to the Moridegs'.'

'Oh, that old Roger will do him no harm.'

'No; not Roger, though he is a jail-bird.'

'You made him a jail-bird, Physic, I suppose. He was a harmless enough old fellow. As for his wife, she's a witch, but I don't fear her and her evil eye.'

'The young one's witchcraft is the most dangerous, and a loving eye is more mischievous than an evil one.'

'What do you mean, Physic?'

'I only repeat what I have heard. Mr. Justinian goes to the Tolmenna hut a great deal. Now I have had that pulled down, as it is on a property I have bought, and I suppose the Moridegs are all over the place, without a home to shelter them. There is no saying what your son may be doing in his chivalry to help them.'

'Stuff! I'll hear nothing of this,' said Percival Curgenven irritably. 'You shall stay for dinner, but enough of this scandal. I don't believe a word.'

However, the hint had lodged like a barbed arrow in the heart of the father, and had redoubled his uneasiness. The day had closed in, and still Justinian had not appeared.

When Percival had returned to the house, he ran up-stairs to wash his hands and change his coat for dinner, and had met his wife on the stairs descending. She looked pale and somewhat weary, but she had a smile on her lips. She had dressed hastily, put a flower in her bosom and another in her dark hair of so deep a crimson that it showed her pallor. She extended her arms to meet her husband.

'Percy,' said she, 'you have not welcomed me home.'

He coloured and stammered.

'Really, dear Theresa, I am ashamed. It is not my fault; that confounded monkey, Justin, is to blame. Fancy that

fellow running off to the moors when his father comes home. It is too bad, and it has upset me.'

She put up her hands, drew his face down to hers, and gently caressing his cheek, said, 'Of course I forgive you. How could I do other—when you have given me a home, oh, and such a home! Dear! I have taken my candle and been round it.' Then she kissed him, and passed on the stairs continuing her descent.

The gong sounded for dinner whilst Percival was changing his boots. He came down as quickly as he could, and found his wife and Physic in the drawing-room awaiting him. During the meal he left the agent to carry on the conversation with Theresa. He was absent, listening for the foot of his son in the hall, and wondering that he did not return. If he joined in the conversation it was for but a moment, and then his mind wearied of whatever topic was discussed, and reverted to Justinian. He imagined that some accident might have befallen him, and then the hint thrown out by Physic disturbed him in no less degree.

He caught Theresa's eye repeatedly resting on him. She knew what was troubling his thoughts, and destroying his zest for his dinner, for his wine, for the talk about the place and its affairs, the neighbourhood, and the petty incidents that had occurred during his brief absence.

At length, when the dessert was laid, he stood up, the anxiety had become unendurable, and he asked Theresa and Physic to excuse him, he must go and look for Justinian.

'Let me go,' said the agent. 'I dare be sworn I know where to find him.'

'No,' said Percival hastily, and his brow contracted. 'No, Physic, you remain here and amuse Mrs. Curgenven; I must go after the truant myself. You will not be vexed with me, Theresa, will you?'

'No, dear, assuredly not.'

He went forth into the beautiful moonlit night, and, as we have seen, by accident took the right instead of the wrong lane that led forth upon the moor. The lanes that conducted to the waste were all provided with gates to prevent the wild ponies and cattle from straying into cultivated land and losing themselves among the roads. One of these gated lanes led by 'The Chough,' and at 'The Chough' he chanced to inquire, and thus learned that Justinian had gone part way to Trewortha with the girl Morideg. He followed, and arrived at the cross just as the young couple parted.

'Justin, my boy! What is the meaning of this?'

The lad was taken aback, and did not at once reply.

'Justin, I don't like this. Why are you away from home, and out and rambling the lanes with a common village girl?'

'She is not and never was a village girl,' answered Justinian, recovering himself; 'she is a wild moor colt, that is all. What have you against her?'

'Nothing. I have something against you. It is not right for you——'

'Father, *honi soit qui mal y pense.* The Moridegs have been bundled neck and crop out of their house by that rascal Physic —I wonder why you employ him!—and I have been helping to house the homeless—a work of mercy, father.'

'It does not look well.'

'Alice likes her, so do I, and she loves us both, for on my honour, I believe we are the only people in the world who care for her, beside old Roger and her grandmother.'

'Well, well!—more of this another time. I have another crow to pluck with you.'

Justinian guessed what his father meant. He was silent for a minute or two, walking beside him. Then he said abruptly: 'It's no good your asking me to do it. I cannot call her my mother, and I won't. I love my own dear mother—and love to hear you talk of her, and tell how good she was. I can't take this strange woman into my heart, as you have done.'

'I do not ask you to do that,' said Mr. Curgenven, standing still and looking in the face of the tall, handsome boy, lit by the full lustre of the moon. And as he looked he saw in the

eyes, in the brow, in all the upper part of the face, the likeness to his first wife. Percival Curgenven heaved a sigh. 'No, Justin, I do not ask you not to continue to love, I do not wish you for a moment to forget your dear dead mother. I do not forget her, I do not cease to love her. But, my boy, you are old enough to know that such an establishment as Curgenven cannot be managed by old Bathsheba. She has kicked over the caldron already. I must have some one competent to manage. I do not ask you to love my present wife in any degree as you do your own dead mother, but you must honour her as you regard me.'

'Yes, father,' said Justinian, subdued, 'I will do my best. Do you think she really cares for you, or has only taken you for your money?'

'I am sure she loves me.'

'If she is good to you, I shall respect her. There—I promise that.'

'Do you consider, my boy,' continued Mr. Curgenven, 'that you have given me great pain to-day?'

'How so?'

'In absenting yourself on my arrival. It was a slight to my wife, and a cruel blow to me. You little know how you have hurt me.'

'Father!'

The lad threw his arms round Mr. Curgenven's neck. 'I am sorry. I was wrong; I was very wrong.'

'And now—one word, Justin, more. You say that your love is to your mother. Let the remembrance of her accompany you always when you are with that girl Esther.'

The lad squeezed his father's hand. He looked up in his father's face and said, 'I was foolish. For one moment a warmer thought came over me than I ought to have held, and I kissed her. I will not do it again. I promise you, father—by my thoughts and love of my mother.'

CHAPTER XIII.

A MENACED HOME.

When Percival left the dining-room, he begged Physic to excuse him, and remain with the wine as long as he liked. Mrs. Curgenven withdrew to the drawing-room. There the candles had been lighted in sconces on the wall, and a brisk bright fire was burning in the grate.

Theresa sank into an arm-chair before the fire.

The drawing-room was singularly beautiful; it was in white and gold, with a painted ceiling, and with charming Watteau subjects in panels on the walls. The room was lofty, curtains and furniture of turquoise-blue silk. Choice flowers from the greenhouse were arranged in every available vase and glass, and exhaled a delicate fragrance. The room was cheerful at night. There was a cut-glass chandelier in the midst, pendent from the ceiling. It was not lighted, but it reflected the twinkle of the fire and the flames of the candles on the walls.

Theresa was in a dark dress, the only dark object in this sparkling apartment.

As she sank into the easy-chair she uttered a sigh of satisfaction. At length she had found rest.

She looked dreamily into the fire, and her past unfurled before her. Never, from her infancy, had she possessed a home of her own. As a young girl she had lived on the charity of the kind old lady who had adopted her. On the death of Mrs. Fenton she had been cast adrift on the world, and when married hastily, it was not to be given a home by her sailor husband, but to be lodged in hotels and pensions, till he deserted her. After that her career had been varied and her fortune had been chequered. But never once in all the variations and chequerings had the time and chance come to her when she could call a space within four walls—her home. Except her little desk of inlaid olive-wood, she had nothing that she could regard as permanently her own. Boxes, portmanteaus had been worn out with much travelling, dresses changed, little articles of jewellery had been got rid of in times of need. Only that small desk and the letters and other trifles it contained had remained to her of the past, and might alone have remained hers till her dying hands let go their clasp of it.

But now Percival Curgenven had given her a home—a

beautiful home that had legitimately been hers for many years, but which had been usurped by another.

She turned her large dark eyes round and looked at every object in this fair parlour. She had excellent taste and she fully appreciated the beauty. But hardly as fully could she realize that it was her own. That chair in which she sat was her own now. And hitherto she had never even possessed a chair that was hers. Those she had rested in had been let with the lodgings, or were the furniture of the hotel. She put her hands to the soft silken arms of the chair and clasped them, to feel that they were realities. She stood up, and walked round the room, touching the various objects, and whispering to herself, 'And this also is mine.' The flowers were from her conservatory. The old Sèvres and Dresden china belonged to her. She looked up at the painted ceiling. Cherubs were represented there flying, strewing flowers, and unrolling a scroll on which was inscribed the family motto, 'Tandem.'

'Tandem,' repeated Theresa after she had read it. 'At last! Yes—that is my motto; at last I have a home, at last rest, at last no concern for the morrow what it may bring forth.'

On a table was a little fan of white ivory delicately pierced, with the silk web adorned with spangles: one of the fans that

were fashionable at the beginning of this century, fans to sparkle under sparkling chandeliers, fanning ladies in dresses of white gauze broidered with sparkling bugles.

Theresa took it up without much thought; opened and closed it, and returned with it in her hand to her seat before the fire. There she sat, not leaning back, but forward, with her head lightly bowed, looking into the fire, with the fan on her knees. Occasionally feeling inconveniently hot from the glow in the grate she unfurled the fan, and then let it fall together again, fold on fold, unconscious that it was closing, so abstracted was she in her thoughts.

She knew very well that her position would be a difficult one. She was without a friend near—a relative she had never to her knowledge had. By education and in feeling she was a lady, with the tastes, the instincts, the tact, the tenderness of a lady; but she was well convinced that her claim to be one would be disputed. She had been on the stage. What was to be expected of an actress? It was true that she had appeared on the boards in subsidiary characters, and for a very brief period indeed; nevertheless the fact remained, that she had been an actress. She had sung as a professional performer in concerts and oratorios. To have exercised a profession at all would damn her in many eyes. She had been a governess, and a governess in a family connected with the

Curgenvens. She had—as she knew it would be put—occupied a menial position; and that it had been menial she could not deny. Finally there remained the fact that she was by birth worse than a nobody.

She had told everything to Percival. Percival could never reproach her with having hid aught from him. But she doubted whether she had done right in accepting him—not for her own sake but for his. He had been told that he had best marry some one with an established position and with relatives, but he had persisted in taking her. Ought she not, for the sake of him, and as a return for his generous love, to have persisted on her side in refusing him? Then she asked herself—could she have borne to have gone on with such a life as had been hers, when the chance of leaving it had been given her? She gave a gasp, and looked hurriedly round, unfurled the fan once more, and again settled into thought.

Would it matter to her very greatly if the neighbourhood gave her the cold shoulder? She cared little or nothing for the position in society she had acquired, what she did value was the substantial reality of a home free from sordid money cares, that could not be taken from her—that none could dispute. As for social intercourse with the county people and parsons' wives, she did not suppose that it would prove to her a rich gain if she obtained it, or a sensible loss if she were

denied it. The great smothering sand-dune of common-place rolls over the coast-land and destroys all vegetation save the wiry grass and thistle that spring out of the poorest soil. There are those dunes in all spheres of life, in all much the same, and all equally sterile, all equally impatient of any form of life save the meanest and most vulgar.

Suddenly, with a shiver that thrilled her entire frame, Theresa started out of her dream, looked over her shoulder, and uttered a cry of terror; then recovered herself and said, 'I beg your pardon, Mr. Physic. I did not hear you enter—and I thought I saw a ghost.'

'I hope I am not intruding.'

'Not at all,' she said coldly.

'Mr. Curgenven will not be back for some time, not if he is sweeping the moors for that scapegrace son of his, who will give him trouble enough and to spare before many years are over. In the meanwhile, till his return, I should like a few words with you, madam.'

With her fan Theresa wearily indicated a chair.

Something in her gesture, in her expression of face, in the tone of her voice, angered the agent, and instead of seating himself he took hold of the chair, turned it round, and leaning an elbow on the back, and planting a knee on the seat, said, 'Madam! so you think I am now nothing; that I am only

your humble servant, to be ordered about, and bid send in my bill for work done, and have the odd pence struck off in the cheque that pays me?'

Theresa looked at him in surprise.

'Oh yes!' sneered he, 'you act your part well, my lady! You have stepped from the stage to the dress-circle, and think to spurn me, do you—eh?'

Theresa saw that he had been drinking, not enough to make him tipsy, but enough to give him insolence. She said, 'I shall leave the room, Mr. Physic.'

'You shall not,' he replied; 'I will bar your way.'

'Then I shall ring to have you ejected.'

'Oh yes! I like that! Have *me* ejected; *you* eject me! And do you know that I hold you, body and soul, in the hollow of my hand?'

Theresa put her hands on the elbows of her chair to raise herself. Physic at once discovered her object, and swinging round the chair on which he leaned, he stepped forward and put his hand on her arm, forcing her back in her seat.

'No,' said he, 'you shall not ring the bell. I advise you to listen to what I have to say. We must understand one another. You have had to listen to plain speeches in your life more than once. You were not born to be wrapped in cotton-

wool from every breath of cold, and have a gold spoon put to your mouth with sugared pap.'

'I have had to put up with a great deal of impertinence and vulgarity, as you say,' answered Theresa, raising the fan.

'Yes,' said he, 'I understand what that fan means. You gave me a rap across the back of my hand with the reins once. And you are ready to do it again. But don't be afraid of me. I have something to tell you that will astonish you, but I will not step another inch nearer to you than this—and see, I put the chair between us again.' He resumed his first position.

'Then be good enough to say what must be said in the fewest possible words.'

'As you will, madam.' He rested his chin in his hand, and kneeling on the torquoise-blue seat of his chair looked hard at her. 'Humph! I did not know you were striking at higher game when you refused my honourable offer. But let me tell you, that clever as you have been in bringing down your quarry, you have made one fatal blunder. Do you remember that paper you put into my hands when you were in the bungalow?'

Theresa started.

'Do you remember what was endorsed on it? That it was the will of Captain Lambert Curgenven? And that it was to be used or suppressed according as I thought good?'

Theresa nodded slightly. Her heart began to beat with real alarm.

'Very well, madam,' pursued the agent, 'you never committed a greater folly in your life than when you put that paper into my hands. When you delivered that to me, you delivered yourself also, body and soul, to me. Look about you. That's a pleasant fire, is it not? That's a handsome, sparkling chandelier, ain't it? This is a pretty room, with its white and gold and blue, is it not? You think it is all yours, don't you? It is yours as long as I let you enjoy it; not an hour longer. You talk of ejecting me from the house! Why, madam, it is I who can eject you and your husband and his precious cub any day. I have the lever which will tumble you all down, and that lever you put into my palm—fool that you were.'

Physic was silent, and gazed with evil triumph on Theresa, who looked at him with large dazed eyes, half rising in her seat, the fan fallen at her feet.

'Shall I tell you what that will contains which is now in my charge, to use or not to use as seems best to me? By that will, which is the only one ever made by Captain Lambert after his marriage with Miss Jane Pamphlet, and which was no marriage at all, as you were alive, he acknowledges the invalidity of the marriage and bequeaths all his estate in trust

to Miss Jane Pamphlet, commonly known as Mrs. Lambert Curgenven, and to Mr. Percival Curgenven, in trust, I say, for his natural daughter, Alice Pamphlet, commonly known as Alice Curgenven. Now—how do you relish that, madam? Have I not in my hands something that can deal you a sharper rap than the reins in your hand dealt to me? Can't I hurt you a good deal more than you hurt me, when you said, "I reject your offer, I won't be Mrs. Physic," a respectable man's wife in a good business?' He chuckled and rubbed his hands together over the chair-back.

'I will speak of this to my husband,' said Theresa in a tremulous voice, and put her hand to her head, where the pulses were throbbing as though to burst. A few minutes ago she was congratulating herself that she had at length found a home, certain to be hers for the remainder of her days, and already the insecurity of her hold on it was revealed. She had craved for and found rest, but only for a few moments. She was again thrown back into the whirlpool of contending currents, in which she must continue to battle for existence.

'No,' answered Physic, 'I forbid you to speak to Mr. Percival on the subject. You are a woman of the world and I am a man of the world—and we understand that with a certain class of people we must deal according to their folly. Your husband is one of those fly-away, romantic, up-on-top-of-a-pole

folk. If he knew about this he would throw up the whole concern, and then where would he be, and his dearly beloved cub, Justinian, and you, my lady, who have spread your nets so cleverly? No, if you dare to speak to him of this, then the game is up. You need not unpack your travelling trunk; it is waste labour to take out the new dresses you bought, or had given you, in town, and fold them in drawers or bury them in wardrobes. Alter the direction from Curgenven House to the Pill-box, and send for a cab to remove you and your effects as soon as may be. But mind you, Mr. Percival will owe to the estate every penny that has been drawn from it since he came here. He will have to pay back what he took for all the presents he made you, for the marriage licence, for everything, and you know well that will leave him something worse than a beggar. He is not the man to think of all this; we must think and provide for him. Upon my word! That will be a come-down off his tall perch, to have to retreat with humiliation to the Pill-box again, and to have all the newly-engaged servants clamouring in his ears for their wages, and not have a penny in his pocket wherewith to satisfy their demands. Who can say whether the Pill-box is available to receive him again? I suppose he gave notice to surrender his tenure, and it may be let. Then whither is he to go to hide his head? How do you think he will relish the exchange

into poverty from wealth—from being a somebody to sink into a nobody again? You may take my word for it, without counting the cost, he will throw up all if we allow him, and then in will march my Lady Jane and smoke all the rooms to disinfect them, polluted by your presence, and won't she pirouette on stilts at your downfall!'

'Where is this will you speak of?'

'I have it in my desk in my office.'

'I should wish to see it.'

'I will bring you a copy.'

'I do not desire a copy. I must see the original. Bring it here.'

'No, thank you. If you want to see it, you must come to Liskeard and see it in my office.'

'I will do so. Now leave me.'

Mr. Physic left, and Theresa fell back in her chair, and let her arms drop by her side. She was as one stunned by a blow on the head. For some moments she could neither think nor feel. Consciousness departed, and all was dark before her eyes.

CHAPTER XIV.

PAX ALL ROUND.

When the light returned to Theresa's eyes, and the blood began once more to circulate in her veins, she saw Percival stooping over her, but it was some moments before she could realize who it was.

'My dear,' he asked, 'what is it? Are you overdone?'

She tried to smile to reassure him, but her muscles had not recovered sensibility.

He was alarmed. 'What has happened?' he asked. 'Do speak, Theresa. Have you fainted?'

Then with a gasp life returned, and she threw her arms round his neck and drew his head down to her face. Her cheek was cold, and a tear was on it like a drop of ice.

In his uneasiness when he studied her countenance, he saw how sunken were the eyes, and he kissed her face.

'Are you very ill?—do tell me, my dear! How has this come on you?'

'I shall be better directly,' she said, now panting for breath as though she had run a long way.

'Look, Theresa, here is Justinian,' said Percival Curgenven; 'the fellow has been found at last. I have brought him home, and now he desires to pay you his respects. But you are too tired, too ill—now.'

'No,' she said, recovering herself, and catching at the chance of diverting the current of her thoughts into another channel. 'No; where is he?'

Justinian stepped forward. He had entered the drawing-room rather sheepishly, following his father, and had stood with his lips curled contemptuously at the endearing terms of his father addressed to Theresa, and had turned his head aside in disgust when she put her arms round her husband's neck.

Justinian had made up his mind during the walk home at his father's side, as to the line he would adopt, as to the limits of his concession. He would be respectful and gracious to his step-mother as the wife of his father.

He was, however, resolved to let her clearly understand that he tolerated her presence in the house and accepted her as the companion of his father, much as he would accept a

new spaniel or a parrot that his father had chosen to bring home as a pet. He would give her to understand that it would be lost labour for her to attempt to gain his esteem, let alone his affection; that he did not harbour resentment towards her for having dared to step into that place which had once been occupied by his own mother, but that he would cover over his sentiments with a decent veil so as not to distress his father. But if, at any time, she attempted to sow discord between him and his father, then he would be free to express his opinions, and show his sentiments without reserve. It was advisable, nay, it was necessary, that the conditions of peace should be concluded at once; and Justinian desired to have a few words with the new Mrs. Curgenven, without the privity of his father. As Percival stood aside, Justinian advanced with a toss of his head and a swing in his walk, that, had Theresa been in a condition to observe him, would have told her at a glance how reluctant the boy was to come to an amicable arrangement.

'I am very sorry,' said he, awkwardly, 'that I was the cause of the accident when your collar-bone was broken.'

'Oh!' answered Theresa, with a smile, 'that was what brought your father to me, it was a happy accident to me.'

Justinian frowned and screwed up his lips. If it were so,

then he had double cause to regret that the confounded fire-balloon was carried against the head of Mr. Physic's cob.

The shadow of his father had been on Theresa, now Mr. Curgenven stepped to the table, and the light from the candles on the mantelpiece fell on her face and revealed the worn, distressed expression, the lustrous eyes, the dark rings about them, and the paleness. The face was still beautiful, though youth had passed, and it wore at this moment a look of pleading pathos.

'I'm blessed!' said Justinian to himself. 'The poor devil *is* ill!'

Theresa held out her hand to the young fellow, and Justinian placed his in hers, coldly, with his fingers limp as strips of leather.

She did not appear to notice his lack of response, and retained his hand.

'I should like,' she said, turning her head towards her husband, 'I should like to have Justin here all to myself for a few minutes, between four eyes, as the Germans say.'

'Certainly, my dear, if you are sufficiently recovered for a talk. I'll go and look up Physic, and see whether my wine has sent him a dive under the table, or whether he has driven home. I have a few odd matters about which to talk to him.'

Then Mr. Curgenven left the room.

There was a stool under a little table near Theresa's chair. She pointed to it with her foot and said, 'Would you mind drawing that up close, and sitting on it?'

The lad shuffled uneasily and made no attempt to comply with her request. He would not sit at her feet—at her feet indeed! at her feet! What are we coming to next! She'd be ordering him about, make him say his catechism, bid him hold the wool whilst she unwound the skein! Bid him stick his ears under the cap lest they should protrude!

He answered somewhat sternly, 'I'd rather stand; I am not at all tired.'

'It was not for your sake—it was for mine I asked it,' said Theresa gently. 'I wished to study your face more closely. You have your mother's eyes and brow exactly. I am not surprised at your father loving you so dearly.'

'You knew my mother?'

A little contraction—a little life in the hand she held.

'To be sure I did. Has not your father told you so? I nursed her in her last illness. It was very sad to be ill to death in a Californian hotel, with folk coming and going, drinking, dancing, noise—and she——' Theresa studied his face, and then said, 'I wish you would stoop, just to be kind and oblige me. It is your mother, your sweet mother, I am

looking at in you. Justin—I held her poor hand as I hold yours now, held it when burning with fever, and held it as it grew cold in death.'

His fingers were trembling in hers, and he drew them hastily away lest she should notice it.

Then he bent on one knee, so as to place his face on a level with hers, and let her lay her hands on his shoulders.

'I hope it will be a bond between us,' said Theresa, 'that we both loved her, though you do not remember her—or hardly so—yet you love her, and so did, and so do I.'

'I think I can remember something about her.'

'Yes, but you were very young. Do you know, I received almost her last kiss. Not her last—that was for you. I had you in my arms and brought you to her, and held you over the bed to her. Then she put up her lips and touched with them this hand.'

She removed her right hand from Justinian's shoulder. He took it at once, held it, and his mouth quivered. He wished to kiss where his mother had kissed, but his pride intervened and he let go her hand again.

'I will tell you some day all that I can remember about her; but I knew her only when she was weak and ill. I never saw her in her full strength and beauty. And that

which is a bond between you and me is a bond also between your father and me.'

'Do you talk to him about my mother?'

'Indeed I do. You need not think, Justin, that any love he may feel for me will diminish that he ever bears in his heart for her who was his first love. Love is not a stream which if diverted to water this field and that field is exhausted and leaves its bed dry. Nor is it soil that if it grow one crop is fatigued and cannot produce another. It is like the inexhaustible sun that can flood many with its light, and quicken them with its warmth, and each does not rob the other of what is his share. It is like the mighty ocean that can roll round and bathe many islands, and it is always the same wide and deep sea to one and all.'

A wonderful softness and sweetness was in her face as she spoke, it was as though some of the light and heat of that sun, some of the depth and saltness of that ocean, were in the solemn dark eyes fixed on the boy, out of whose features all the hardness had gone, from whose lips the defiance had faded, and from whose eyes the antagonism had disappeared.

'You ran away to-day, Justin, because you hated to see me arrive. Was it not so?'

The lad coloured and hung his head.

'I know it was so; and I honour you for the chivalrous

hold on the memory of your mother. You thought I would blur that over in the heart of your father, and that I might in some way turn away his love from you.'

'Yes—it was so,' said Justinian.

'You were mistaken in thinking this. If we live together long, you will find how greatly you have been mistaken. I have but one object now in life, and that is to make your father happy, who has done so much for me; and I knew he could not be happy were there anything of estrangement between him and you. He could not love me if he thought I, in any manner, drew a bunch of nettles between himself and you. I believe it was the thought of your mother, the delight of having some one to speak to who remembered her, that brought about his entertaining some liking for me. For in me there was nothing else. I have neither youth nor looks——'

'Oh, step-mother, you are beautiful.'

'No, Justin, I am past the turn of life, and am withering slowly away. I am even past the time when jealousy affects me; as to yourself, I shall never rob you of any of your father's love. To-day he forgot me, he left me, so unhappy was he because you were away, and he ran off to find you without giving me another thought. This did not make me jealous. On the contrary, it made me admire and love your

father all the more. It showed me what a depth of tenderness, what a strong, tough endurance of love there was in his heart, that makes him cling to one whom he loves and who belongs to him. I hope that I shall win in time some such deep strong love for myself. It is worth having. It is worth devoting one's life to deserve it. Do not undervalue it, Justin.'

The boy drew the stool from under the table, seated himself on it, and leaning his cheek on the arm of Theresa's chair looked up into her face. He had forgotten his mistrust, lost his dislike for her.

'I should wish to ask you something,' she said.

'Ask me what you will, step-mother.'

'Do you suppose your father would be content to return to the old house and manner of life?'

'What—to that beastly Pill-box? I should just think not.'

'Is he happy here in this grand mansion?'

'Of course he is. You wouldn't like to have to go back to Miss Treise, the milliner's little lodgings over the shop, would you, now?'

'No, perhaps not.'

'I should say most certainly not.'

'But,' continued Theresa, 'your father was never the man to value splendour and comforts.'

'Because he never had the chance of enjoying them. He

had to manage to get along as best he might in old days. He didn't like it, but he couldn't help it. Now it's quite another matter. By Jove!' exclaimed the boy, 'if I thought it was all up with us here, and we had to quit, I'd cut my stick and be off out of the country, anywhere. I wouldn't show my face in Liskeard, no, nor in England; having been a young squire once, I couldn't come down.'

'You are confident your father likes his present condition? He grumbles a good deal about it.'

'Oh, that's his way. Of course he likes to be a J.P. and a squire, and to be able to give a fellow shooting and fishing over his property and in his waters, and to have money in his pocket instead of a hole. Only he doesn't care to show how it pleases him. That's all.'

Justinian considered a moment, then laughed and said, 'And what's as jolly as anything is to be able to order that chap Physic about, and have him awfully civil, instead of being patronized by him as we were before. He is a cad, and I hate him.'

Justinian drummed with his fingers on the chair. Then he said, 'What do you think, step-mother, that Physic has been about? He has turned the Moridegs out of their house, has torn the roof off and pulled down the walls.'

'Who are the Moridegs?'

'Oh! don't you know? Old Roger knocked Physic down when he was told that he was to be turned out of house and home by him, and so Physic sent him to prison. He is quite an old chap and perfectly harmless. His wife is a queer creature, people think her a white-witch and that she has the evil eye, but I don't hold with all that stuff.'

'Have they a family?'

'N—no, not exactly. There's a grandchild, you know. It's an awful shame, and that is one reason why I have been away from Curgenven to-day. I have been seeing these poor old creatures under shelter. Physic would have let them starve and die of exposure on the moor.'

'And Mr. Physic, if he could, would turn us out, you and your father and me, turn us out of this beautiful house.'

'I have no doubt about it,' answered Justinian with vehemence. 'Not a shadow of a doubt about it. The joy and fun is—he can't.'

'I hope not.'

'I am sure he cannot. By Jove, if I thought he could I'd knock him down as old Morideg did, if I had to go to gaol for it. I'd go and sing praises there, as Paul and Silas did.'

'He shall not do it,' said Theresa in a low tone. 'No, he shall not do it.'

Then Mr. Curgenven came in. He looked surprised to see

his rebellious boy sitting familiarly by Theresa's side—close to her, playing with her fan that he had picked up from the floor.

'Physic is gone,' said Percival Curgenven. 'He'll have to come out again and see me, I suppose. It is foolish of him to leave without a word.'

'But it is late, Percival, and he has a long drive. How was he to know when you would be returning home? I rather want to go into Liskeard in a day or two, and then I can take him a message from you.'

'That will do. Well! how do you and Justin get on together? Patched up any little disagreements, I hope.'

'We are very good friends,' said Theresa.

'We are the best of friends,' said the boy, standing up; 'and, I say, governor, you might have done worse: as step-mothers go, you couldn't have done better—so Pax all round, I say.'

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE OFFICE.

The town of Liskeard is a strange one. The first question the visitor asks is: 'What can have brought it there?' It does not occupy the ridge or spur of a hill, as one that has gathered round a border castle; it does not occupy a valley by a river, as one that has nestled about an abbey; it is not planted at a convergence of roads, as one that lives and thrives on commerce. It consists of a multitude of houses tumbled promiscuously over steep hill and narrow dale, so that the chimneys of one house throw their smoke in at the windows of another, and a street is as contorted literally as a letter S, and undulates vertically as a switch-back railway.

The reason why Liskeard is a town, and was planted where it is, must be sought down a narrow lane that leads to a great unfailing, limpid spring, pouring forth a flood of the purest water through four orifices. The old British saints loved to

settle by springs of water, and there is hardly a church in Cornwall that is not associated with a holy well. No well in the county is so copious, so marvellous in its unfailing supply, as that of Liskeard. It may have received divine homage in pagan times; it certainly received consecration by some shaggy Celtic hermit; he settled by it, wrought miracles with its water, and his cell became the nucleus of a town.

In an old slated house in one of the tortuous streets of Liskeard lived Mr. Physic, solicitor and property agent. Any one who has been into a lawyer's office anywhere in that world that supports lawyers knows them all. They are as alike as dried peas. Some have more iron cases, lettered with the initials or names of clients, than have others, some have the table more littered with correspondence and half-endorsed deeds than others, but all have the same look, the same smell, the same character.

Mr. Physic had just risen from his desk to take some mid-day refreshment—a glass of sherry and sandwiches—when the clerk showed in Mr. Pike, the horsebreaker.

'How d'y do?' said the agent cheerily. 'And how's the missus and all the babbies?'

'Very well, thank you, sir, very well. We're all tough, thanks be.'

'Take a chair,' said Physic; 'come at an opportune moment.

Just had my humble lunch brought in. Let me pour you out a glass of sherry.'

'No, thank you, sir,' said the horsebreaker, taking a seat. He wanted a glass of wine, he intended to have it, but he knew what good manners were, and required to be pressed.

'Now, come,' said the solicitor. 'You have been engaged with a skittish horse, I can see; look a little pulled about, you do. By name I am allied to the medical profession, so let me prescribe.'

'Thank you, sir, I feel hearty. I never drink before I eat.'

'Then eat, Pike, at once. Here are sandwiches.'

'I wouldn't deprive you.'

'Not deprive me at all. I will ring for more. Now, a glass?' holding the decanter in the position of the earth as it rotates round the sun.

'I really had rather not.'

'Half a glass?'

'Well, then, as you are so pressing, half a glass.'

'Very well, only a half.'

So Mr. Physic filled it, so as not to run over; that made half a glass; a glass that overflows is a whole glass. After Pike had eaten a sandwich and drunk his glass, the agent put his head on one side and said suppliantly: 'Come, let me pour you out another.'

'Not on any account.'

'I insist.'

'Well, there is a crumb in my windpipe—a drop—not above a drop.'

So his glass was replenished.

'Now, then,' said Physic, 'what is the business, Pike?' But just as the lawyer had hung back before asking this question, so now did the horsebreaker hang back from answering it.

'Look there,' said Pike, pointing to a dog on the mat by the fire-place. 'That poor brute has got the distemper. I'll tell you what you should do with her. Give her some wine. She's running at the eyes and nose. If you don't take care you'll lose her. Give her sherry with syrup of squills and camphor-water. That will bring her round like the minute-hand of a clock.'

'I'll do it,' said Physic. 'Now to business. I'm your man.'

'You don't notice any smell, do you?' asked the horsebreaker.

'No, Pike; why?'

'Because there's a man selling real fresh bloaters, and I bought a few and have them here. My wife can't touch red salt herrings; they give her heartburn. But the real fresh

bloater is another thing. The man has a cart-load. I'd have more if I wasn't riding.'

'Well; now to business.'

'Very well, sir.' Pike touched his forehead. 'It's only about a little field and a stable, you know, sir, that Matthew Kneebone had.'

'Oh, you can't have those; they are to be thrown into Philip Downe's lot.'

'It would be uncommon convenient for me.'

'Convenient or not, it can't be helped. I believe Mr. Curgenven has as much as promised it.'

'But I want a paddock, and that stable comes in terrible handy for me.'

'There are difficulties.'

'I dare say there be. But I want that paddock and linney uncommon bad. And, look here, Lawyer Physic, I don't mind a couple of guineas; and I'll give you a bit of advice as may be useful.'

'Oh, advice!'

'Why I reckon if I came to you for advice I'd have to pay six-and-eight for it.'

'Yes, but I am a solicitor.'

'Well, and I am a man who has his eyes and ears open. And the bit o' advice I can give you may be worth many

scores of six-and-eightpences. Take the two guineas'—he put the money, two sovereigns and two shillings, on the table—'and my advice, which is worth more nor that, and manage for me the paddock and the stable.'

'Very well, then,' said Physic, drawing the money to him. 'Now for the advice.'

'They say you're going to open a mine at Tolmenna.'

'Yes, I am.'

'You'll like to go there and look about, and see how the mine gets along.'

'Of course.'

'Then I just wouldn't.'

'Why so?'

'Well, you shouldn't go without some one to be along with you. There's that ou'd chap Morideg, as you sent to prison and turned out o' his house. He ain't gone so terrible far. He's at that wisht place now, Smallacomb, by the Trewortha Marsh. Farmer Hockin have let 'n into an ou'd linney there.'

'And what if he have?'

'Well, he don't look on you with a very loving eye. He's an ignorant man; he's knocked you down once, and he says, says he, give him a chance, and he'll finish you some day. I'd keep off the moors if I was you, lawyer, for a bit. Mebbe Morideg 'll move further off. As long as he's near, and his

heart of a blaze wi' wrongs, if I was you, Lawyer Physic, I'd just keep to the roads and lanes, and not show my head on the moor.'

'If he attempted to lay but a finger on me——'

'I don't reckon he'll lay a finger on you, sir; but he might hap accidental, when you was by, to lay a finger on the trigger of his old gun. He's a cruel good shot, folks say.'

Physic's face turned white.

'I'm really much obliged,' he said. 'I really am. You shall have the paddock and linney. I'll tell the squire they were promised to you before Downe applied.'

'No offence, sir. You don't happen to have an axe or a chopper here, do you?'

'I cannot say I have. Why?'

'Because, Lawyer Physic, if you had, I'd say, put it in the corner, and turn 'n with the blade upperways to cut the ill wish.'

'What ill wish?'

'The old woman, Mrs. Morideg. Her's got the evil eye, and her has ill-wished you afore a score o' people. It's sure to come on you unless you cut it off wi' a hatchet, as I said.'

'I'll risk that, Pike.' Then, as a tap came at his door, in a loud tone: 'Come in!'

'Mrs. Curgenven,' said the clerk. 'Are you engaged, sir?'

'For Mrs. Curgenven, at her service. By-bye, Pike, you shall have the—you know what; and I'll remember what you said.'

As Theresa came in: 'How do you do, my dear madam? What an honour! What a pleasure! Allow me to ring for another glass and some more sandwiches.'

Pike, the horsebreaker, put his hand to his forehead and backed out of the office, but took advantage of Mrs. Curgenven's attention being directed towards the agent to have a good stare at the new squiress.

'A chair—nay, five—all in the office are at your disposal,' said Physic. 'And sherry. What say you, madam? We must build up our constitutions; we mustn't let the clock run down.'

Theresa slightly bowed. She turned to see that Pike had left and had shut the door, and then, coming close to the office desk, and resting her gloved hand on it, she said, 'You are, no doubt, aware for what purpose I am here, Mr. Physic.'

'Stay a bit,' said the agent. He ran to the door and recalled Pike, and when the horsebreaker returned Physic said, 'By the way, I think Mr. Pike may be able to throw some light on a topic we mentioned the other day. Now, my good

fellow, lend me your attention for a few minutes. Screw up your memory to concert pitch. Tell me if by great exertion you can recall what happened in October five years ago.'

'Yes, sir. I broke a nice little cob for Sir Sampson Tregontick.'

'I do not mean that. Can you remember whether you did anything for the late Captain Lambert?'

'No, sir, not five years ago; four years ago, come March, I bought him a mare which I thought 'ud 'a done for his carriage. You see, the second of his pair had a splint——'

'I do not mean that either, Pike. I am referring to your witnessing a document. Did Captain Curgenven ever call you into the house——'

'Into the bungalow, sir.'

'Yes, into the bungalow, to see him set his hand to any document?'

'Oh yes, I remember it quite well.'

'And what was the document, Pike?'

'Well, sir, I can't say as I was given it to look at. The squire he said he only wanted me and Roger Morideg to witness his signature to his will; that was all I knew about it.'

'Exactly. You can write your name, Pike, I suppose?'

'To be sure I can. I'm not a scholar. Never had the chances some young folk has now, but I can write "Samuel Pike"; I can do that.'

'And old Morideg?'

'Oh, he couldn't; he could only put a cross, and that a rare queer one I reckon, so the squire he put to it that it was his token, as how he couldn't write.'

'And you remember this perfectly, Pike?'

'Perfectly. It was just after St. Matthew's fair at Liskeard.'

'Thank you, that will do, Pike. I will not detain you longer.'

When the horsebreaker had left the office, Physic said with a smile: 'I thought it as well, as Pike happened to be here, to find out what he knew about the signature. When I show you the will in a minute or two you will see that it is as he said. He signed his name as witness, and old Morideg set his cross. Why Captain Lambert had these two men in to see him set his hand to the will is not hard to discover. The document was to be used only on an emergency, only in the event of your reappearing, and therefore in the event of his marriage with Miss Jane Pamphlet proving invalid and vitiating the marriage settlement. He therefore went out of his way to get a couple of ignorant and uninterested persons to

act as witnesses. That, I take it, is the meaning of Pike and Morideg having been employed on the occasion. If you have any further doubt—if you think that I am trying to deceive you, go and ask old Roger Morideg. He has no love for me. I consigned him to prison for having knocked me down, and I have turned him out of his house. But he can't deny that he was called in by Captain Curgenven to witness his signature to his last will and testament. Now, madam.'

Physic went to his desk and unlocked a drawer. He drew forth a long envelope, and held it under the eyes of Theresa.

'You remember this, madam? It was what you put into my hands.'

'Yes. That is it,' said Theresa, recognizing at once the inscription on the cover.

'Very well,' said Physic. He drew the contents from the envelope, unfolded and spread the paper on the desk.

'Let me see,' mused the agent. 'How shall it be? I'm not going to put this into your hands. It's too valuable to me, and ditto to you. I'll hold it out flat on the desk, and you shall look over my shoulder and read it. Will that satisfy you?'

'You cannot trust me?'

Physic laughed. 'You've been too long in America. You know too much of the seamy side of life. You've been at the

grindstone so that a fine edge is put on you. Thank you, madam, I'd rather not.'

He stood at the desk with his hands on the open will, and Theresa looked at it over his shoulder.

'There!' said the solicitor, pointing to the bottom of the sheet with a chuckle. 'Look! it is as Pike said: there is Morideg's scrambling cross, as crooked and shapeless as some of the granite crosses on the moor. And there stands "Samuel Pike." No mistake about it, none at all. How do you like it?'

'Let me read it,' said Theresa.

A little hope had risen in her heart that there might be in it some mention of herself—not for the sake of a bequest, but as a token of kindly feeling from her first husband. This will was to stand if she reappeared on the scene. She read it through, but her name did not once occur in it; not a penny was left to her by it; not a token appeared that Lambert entertained the smallest atom of regard for her.

She sighed.

'Ah! it makes you uncomfortable,' said Physic, with a chuckle. 'You don't relish having to turn out of Curgenven, do you?'

'It was not over that I sighed.'

'Oh! but that is not a cheering prospect. What will you

do? "I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed," eh? Go on the stage again, and maintain Mr. Percival in cigars and cheap claret on what you earn? And have that pittance sliced into to send Justinian to school. You would prefer his absence to his presence.'

'I do not believe,' said Theresa, 'that Mrs. Jane will thank you for this will. She would prefer to remain as she is rather than have it produced.'

'I shall not ask her. I know that as well—better than you. She is too proud to endure the thought that she was not married respectably, and is not all square in the sight of society. But that is nothing to me. I prove the will, whether she likes it or not—whether you like it or not. I shall find some explanation for its not having been produced earlier.'

'But if Mrs. Jane Curgenven does not wish it, why should you?'

'Put it as you will. I am an honourable man, and am bound to carry out the instructions of my deceased client. Or put it,' he laughed, 'that I owe you a grudge for having refused me and taken Percival Curgenven. It is the same to me which way you put it.'

'It is of no use, I suppose, my pleading with you?'

'None the least. Words are naught. But, I won't say

that I am not amenable to reason, if very solid reason—*solid* reason, understand—be given me why I should put the will back in my desk.'

'Surely these are solid reasons, that neither party affected by the will desires its production. I, certainly not, for it sends me and my husband to poverty. But then I am quite sure Jane Curgenven does not desire that this will should be proved; the wound to her pride would be too great.'

'These may be solid reasons to you, but not to me.'

'Then what do you mean?'

'Come, now,' said Physic, 'I'm going to open a mine on a bit of moor I've acquired. It will cost money, and I shall have to sink a lot before there can be any return. Now, look here, madam, I will undertake one thing. Find me three hundred pounds, and for a twelvemonth you shall hear no more of this will. It shall remain in my desk, and not even walk out of its envelope.'

'Three hundred pounds!'

'Three hundred pounds. Unless that be forthcoming within one fortnight, I shall go to the Probate Office with the will.'

'I will speak to my husband.'

'You shall not mention it to him. I tell you he is too careless about consequences to be trusted. The will proved,

he will curse his stars he was such a fool as not to propitiate me.'

'But how am I to find three hundred pounds?'

'That is your affair. A woman of the world such as you is full of expedients.'

CHAPTER XVI.

AN ENCOUNTER.

It was Sunday: a fair and pleasant day. The Sunday-school scholars in file had been marched to church and ranged on their benches, exhaling around them a combined odour of soap and bergamot.

Farmers, in their glossy black coats and tall hats of antiquated fashion, took their places. The servants from the rectory and from the Manor arrived as flights of humming-birds, so brilliant was their plumage. The choir were collected about the organ that occupied the north chancel aisle, and at it sat, or 'presided,' as newspapers say, Jane Curgenven in widow's weeds. The organ had stood for several decades under the tower arch at the west end of the nave, where it was in perhaps the best position it could occupy. But there is a fashion in placing organs as there is a fashion in hats, and when the fashion was in full flow to have the organ at the east

end of an aisle, where it would be most unsightly, at considerable cost it was removed to that position, and the rector preached on the occasion to assure the parishioners that the changed position of the instrument had no doctrinal signification.

At the urgency of the incumbent, to the irritation and amid the growls of the neighbourhood, on the death of the penultimate squire a memorial reredos had been set up to him in the chancel by public subscription, and now the neighbourhood was in agonies of apprehension lest an appeal should go forth for subscriptions to a memorial window to the late squire. The reredos in question was an elaborate structure of marble and tile, in which were floreated niches designed and executed to contain nothing, and exquisitely sculptured frameworks to enclose blanks. This reredos also, as the Rev. Mr. Pamphlet assured all doubters, had positively no meaning.

Indeed, so scrupulous a man was the Rev. Mr. Pamphlet lest erroneous teaching should be presented to eye or ear of his flock, that he took precautions to teach them nothing at all. He may be said through his pastorate to have dealt with sacrament and ceremony as boys do with eggs. Having blown out all their contents, he bade his parishioners thank Heaven that it was their glorious, their precious privilege to possess in their beloved church a museum of empty shells.

Mrs. Jane had her eye on the manorial pew that occupied the south chancel aisle. As long as she had been squiress she had not taken her place in it, as duty had called and glued her to the organ-stool, save on saints' days, when there was no choir. As Miss Pamphlet, daughter of the rector, she had drilled the choir, and had played the instrument that accompanied their voices. She did not resign her post, when she became lady of the manor, to school-master, mission woman, or Scripture reader, for the first could not manipulate an instrument; the mission woman, on principle, would play Gregorian music only; and the evangelist, also on principle, nothing but Moody and Sankey. Consequently the squiress had maintained her place as teacher of the singers and organist throughout her reign, and had never consciously desired to resign it for the more dignified and dominating position in the squirearchical pew under the monuments of many past Curgenvens and the helmet and tabard of Sir Justin Curgenven the Crusader, that hung below the wall-plate.

Now, however, that her right to occupy this pew was lost, she hankered after it, and was conscious of a consuming bitterness in her heart at the thought that perhaps the place therein that had been hers, had she cared to take it, for seventeen years, would now be invaded by a stranger—and such a stranger! That her place—*her* place, the place of Jane

Curgenven of immaculate fame, who had never missed a choir practice, been the mainspring of all the parochial activities—should be taken from her by a mere adventuress! Jane Curgenven inadvertently trod on the pedals, and a note that escaped uttered a whine. The boy at the bellows, thinking this was a signal to him to display his energies, began immediately to labour at his lever, and this was followed by bursts of wind from the overladen bellows. Mrs. Jane looked round the angle of the instrument and shook her head at him, when he at once desisted.

Would the person who had married Percival appear in church that day? This was a question in Jane's mind, and she could not resolve whether it would be better for that person to remain away or to appear. If she did not come to church on this her first Sunday at Curgenven it would be much the same as a proclamation to the parish that she was not a Christian and Churchwoman, or, what was much the same thing, did not care to sit under the Rev. Mr. Pamphlet. It would be setting a bad example that was certain to be quoted by total and partial abstainers from divine worship, and it would accordingly be furnishing her, Jane Curgenven, with a grievance that she would be justified in making the very most of. It would be a plausible excuse for letting her imagination riot among the forms of heresy and agnosticism

and atheism prevalent in the United States, and to speculate which had upset the faith of this individual—that is, supposing she ever had any to be upset. But then, on the other hand, if she did come to church, was it desirable, even for the sake of example? Would it not seriously compromise the Church and her father should some dreadful scandal come out relative to this woman's past, or should her moral or social conduct become scandalous in the future? And, again, what good was divine service likely to do to a person of this sort? It could only harden her, deaden her, perhaps puff her up with the thought that she was an admirable member of society and a devout daughter of the Church. Would it not be a sort of sacrilege for a creature of this character to raise her voice in the hymns and psalms, to say 'Amen' to the prayers, and to have the words of her father poured into her ears?

The bell ceased. At once Jane Curgenven rapped on the keys, and the blower bent his back at the bellows. To the strains of 'How beautiful are the feet' there sailed in the rector, in very full surplice and very full white whiskers, from the vestry and up the aisle, like a large white owl.

When the voluntary was concluded Mrs. Jane Curgenven turned in her seat to listen with one ear to the exhortation, and with one eye to observe the manorial pew. In it she saw the new Mrs. Curgenven standing, in plain navy-

blue dress, with simple bonnet with feather and ribbons to match.

'I should have expected her to have been more of a peacock,' mused Jane. 'This kind of people are loud and dressy; but she is acting a part.'

It was remarkable how appropriate psalm and lesson were that day; how they spoke of certain persons being deceitful upon the weights, and lighter than vanity itself; of wandering stars to whom was reserved the blackness of darkness; all of which were of obvious application—so Jane Curgenven thought. Even the rector's sermon had points in it that seemed levelled against the intruder into the manorial pew, which was the more remarkable because the rector took pains to rub down every point that happened to appear in his discourses, lest it should have by hazard personal application to any one who might chance to be present. There are men, say the Germans, on the further side of the hills, and it was only at such as were beyond sight, and among whom his arrows might fall spent, that the Rev. Mr. Pamphlet ever drew his bow. After the service had been ambled through with decorum, and the Benediction had been spoken with pathos, Jane played a voluntary for the departure of the congregation. That ended, and the stops driven in, she turned on her stool and saw that Mrs. Percival Curgenven had not left

the church with the rest, but had waited to retire after all had dispersed. Jane left her seat at the organ as Theresa stepped out of the pew, and both met in the chancel. Jane gave Theresa one of those looks from head to feet that express so much not of compliment but of insult. Then she sniffed, tossed her chin, and strode down the chancel steps, showing the other her back, and that a back that shrugged the shoulders simultaneously, then the right, and next the left; next, the hand, after the glove had been drawn on, was put behind, lifted the skirt and shook it. As Jane entered and passed through the churchyard, her attention was engrossed by the clouds, their shape, their menace of rain, till she had reached the gate opening into the rectory grounds, when she went through and swung it behind her sharply. To her surprise she heard the click of the hasp after it had been shut, and, turning round, saw that Theresa had entered the rectorial precincts.

The temerity of this proceeding roused Jane's anger. She could not legally forbid Theresa entering the church, but she could eject her from private grounds.

She stopped in her walk, and confronted the new squiress with sternness in her face.

'I beg your pardon: this is not a public walk.'

Theresa halted, and said gently, 'I do not wish to intrude.'

'This is private ground.'

'Then I will retire; but might I have a word?'

'You have probably mistaken the person to whom you wish to address yourself. I am Mrs. Curgenven.'

'It is with you I wish to speak.'

'You do me an honour' (spoken in that tone of voice and with an inflection that implied, 'In that you have the advantage of me').

Jane walked leisurely forward, with hand extended to take hold of the gate and close it, and with a repellent expression that forced Theresa to retreat.

Jane would not pause till she had made Percival's wife draw through the opening in the hedge and rail, and then, planting her feet on the granite threshold that served as a step into the churchyard, she said, 'I am at your service. But we lunch punctually at one on Sundays, and I expect to hear the bell shortly. Can you say your word in five minutes? I fear I cannot afford you a longer space for it. You are, if I mistake not——'

'One woman appealing to another woman,' said Theresa quickly. 'It is the will of Heaven that we should occupy the same parish, and we shall be, as near neighbours, constrained to see a good deal of each other. I am an entire stranger in this place. I have no friends but my husband.

I have, to the best of my knowledge, no relations in the world. You are familiar with the neighbourhood, and are one with the society that is found in it. We both loved the same man—bore the same name—though our lots have been so different. You for many years have occupied that position in which I am now placed—one for which I was not born and to which I never aspired.'

Mrs Jane raised her eyebrows and pursed up her lips. 'Never aspired!' she repeated.

'No; to which I never aspired,' said Theresa.

'And may I ask to what this preamble leads?'

'I have come as the woman I describe—a stranger, and friendless—to you, at home and amidst friends, to ask whether it is possible that you can receive and help me.'

Jane looked coldly at her. Was this acting, or was it a real appeal?

'I can quite understand,' she said, 'that with such a past as yours you should seek the help of some one to escape into respectable society.'

'I beg your pardon. My past is not one to be ashamed of,' said Theresa, with some indignation. 'If you mean my birth, that was my misfortune, not——'

'Oh, I did not allude to your birth; of course you could not help that. I cast no reflection on that.'

'Then what do you mean?'

'There are certain—well, you have been on the stage.'

'Yes, for part of a winter. I was driven to it. I needed bread. Would not you have done the same?'

'I—I would have died first. How dare you suggest such a thing to me?'

'What was the harm?'

'Oh, I do not say that the stage itself is harmful; it is the association. Every one knows——'

'Every one does not know,' said Theresa warmly. 'How can you, born in a parsonage, reared under the shadow of the church, living a country life, never associating with any save country people and parsonic families—how can you know anything about the stage?'

'I know this,' said Mrs. Jane: 'the exhalation from a swamp may reach one's nostrils without one having to plunge into it.'

'You have judged partially and unjustly. Excuse my saying so. But, as I said, I was on the stage but for one short period—half a season—and that only because, in the first place, I must have done something in order to live, and, in the next, I took the place of one who from sickness fell out of her engagement. In the difficulties in which the company was situated I was asked to supply her place, and the fact that she was not fulfilling her engagement preyed on her

mind. To satisfy her, I went in her place. Before that, and after that, I never performed. And that person whose place I supplied was my dear present husband's first wife.'

'I thought as much!' exclaimed Jane, with a tone of triumph in her voice.

'What! that I took her place?'

'Oh dear no! but that she had been no better than——'

'She was a lovable, patient person, who was the bread-winner when, for the time, Mr. Percival Curgenven was without work. I knew her and I valued her.'

'"Birds of a feather,"' muttered Jane to herself.

'But that is neither here nor there. You did not know her and her merits. I did. Because I loved and valued her, Percival has taken me. Now to the point. Will you be kind to me? My position is difficult.'

'Kind I will be,' said Jane Curgenven haughtily, 'but you must excuse me if I say that we can never be more than acquaintances, without one atom of sympathy between us. We belong to different worlds of thought and feeling. I could not make a friend of you if I would. There may be—let us hope there are—good people who have taken up with the dramatic profession. But I do not understand them. They may be good; but it is a goodness I cannot comprehend. I live in a world of realities—and cannot understand one of pretences.'

'And you have been at Drumduskie?' asked Theresa, with involuntary irony in her tone.

Jane looked at her stonily. What had Drumduskie, the highly respectable cornfactor, and her own sublimely respectable sister, to do with the stage?—with acting?—with pretences? To Theresa it had seemed in that house as though she—the actress—had been the only person living a life of reality. Mrs. Jane proceeded:

'It is not merely that affair of the stage, which you try to explain away, that forms an insurmountable barrier. You know very well there was that other matter.'

'What other?'

'It is idle to pretend not to understand me. That scandalous, that infamous attempt on my poor dear lost husband!'

'Scandalous! infamous attempt! He was my husband.'

'That I never will admit.'

'But I can produce the most unimpeachable testimony, or rather, I could do so if I cared.'

'Can and could are different tenses.'

'If I have not done so it was out of consideration for you. If I do not do so it is because there is nothing to be gained by it.'

'Oh, pray do not consider me!'

'I acted on your father's request. There was not any

advantage to myself to be reaped by establishing my marriage, and it would have brought distress on Mr. Pamphlet, and pain and humiliation on yourself.'

'You were mighty kind!'

'And even now I could satisfy you if you wished. I have Lambert's letters to me.'

Mrs. Jane flared up. 'For Heaven's sake! He is dead. What may have been your relations to one another in Malta or Corfu, or wherever it was you caught him, poor inexperienced fellow, in your deadly toils, I do not wish to ask. I *will* not inquire. There are certain poisonous combinations which it is deadly to look into. I do not know what Lambert may have written when young and foolish and without strong principles; what I do know is that after he became my husband he was a God-fearing and a moral and honourable man.'

'There is one thing more,' said Theresa, her heart beating with indignation. 'I have reason to suppose that he did sign a paper that practically admitted his marriage to me——'

'I know what you mean,' interrupted Jane. 'Physic spoke about it to me. That man is a scoundrel. He is capable of anything. I can quite believe that a will has been forged for the sake of whitewashing Lambert's temporary connection with yourself. Physic hinted something about

this: it was to restore Curgenven to me and my daughter on the condition that we admitted that I—that she—I cannot even speak it. The thing was too infamous. Physic owes me a spite. He has done it out of malice, and perhaps in connivance with other interested parties.'

'Who could they be? Not I; for if such a will existed and were proved, Percival and I would be thrown into poverty again.'

'Oh, I don't stoop to inquire who contrived the matter. I do not care to unravel these mysteries.'

'And do you mean to say that you would refuse reinstatement in Curgenven Manor at such a price?'

'Most certainly. I will never connive at villainy. There goes the gong: I must to lunch.'

'Then friendship you cannot give me?'

'I cannot do the impossible. Between me and you there is a great gulf fixed, and we cannot shake hands across it.'

CHAPTER XVII.

INVENI PORTUM.

Theresa remained in the churchyard; Jane Curgenven had closed the gate in her face, and had gone off to her lunch.

She seated herself wearily on a flat tombstone. The clerk had departed, and none of the congregation remained around the church. They had all gone to their midday meal. The yard was therefore as solitary as it was likely to be at midnight.

Theresa's brain was on fire, and a load of lead was on her heart. With her lay the decision of a momentous question—whether the will of the late Captain Lambert Curgenven was to be produced or not.

She understood the reason why Physic had objected to her consulting her husband. Percival was a man to decide offhand on any question by its superficial merits. On the

surface, unquestionably, this case was simple enough. A will had been made, and therefore ought to be produced. To make away with such a document was felony, involving penal servitude. But what might be criminal by law need not be wrong in morals. There was much below the surface qualifying this question and making it difficult of solution, because complicating it with obligations to the wishes of living persons and with consideration for the memory of the dead.

If that will were to make its appearance, it would act as a bomb of dynamite thrown into Curgenven, carrying disaster and dismay on all sides.

Theresa had no great pity for Jane Curgenven, and no overwhelming regard for her father, but she knew that no blow could search out and cut to the quick their self-esteem, which was their prevailing if not their only passion, more cruelly than were she by means of this document to expose the real position Jane Pamphlet had held, and to deprive her of every title to be called by any other than her maiden name, and to bastardize her child. How terrible for the mother to have to inform her daughter that they could no longer bear the name that they had worn with such confidence! Not at any price, not certainly at that of reinstatement in Curgenven, would Jane submit to such shame. To be Miss Jane Pamphlet, squiress of Curgenven, would be to

her worse than to have to fly to a desert island and there hide her dishonour.

Notwithstanding the rudeness, the unkindness Theresa had encountered, she shrank from causing Jane so much distress; she was unable to refuse a certain amount of admiration for the resolution with which this woman shut her ears and blinded her eyes to unpleasant facts, and by denying them thought that she deprived them of their right to be facts. But all Jane's resistance and pertinacity in refusing to see what was unpleasant could avail her nothing were the will established. It would be as the mistress, and not as the wife, of the late Captain Lambert that Jane could alone inherit Curgenven, at the same time that she resigned to the woman she looked upon as the dirt under her feet the honourable title of wife which she had so long borne.

Theresa, moreover, pitied the old rector, who had stalked so complacently on his stilts, a head taller morally than every one else; pitied him when she thought how the truth, if made public, would bear him down. The truth he had been obliged to admit, and for the sake of concealment had been ready to waive all claims of his daughter and grand-daughter on the Curgenven estate. But he might admit it to his own heart and remain on his stilts. If it became public he would come down, stilts and all.

Theresa thought also of her husband, of the ease and happiness that seemed to enhalo his later life. In the vigour of youth, in the strength of manhood he had made a botch of life; was it likely that he would be able to earn his living when he had turned the corner of his career? The desultory, erratic habit was inbred. He had not, under stress of necessity, been able to buckle to serious and steady work in the first half of life; was he likely to do so, to reveal energy and show perseverance, in the second stage?

She thought of Justinian. The boy had had his education neglected. His father had made him as himself, or had done his best to do so. A boy of generous disposition and warm heart; one who was cut out by nature to be a good country squire whose object in life is sport. But he was fit for nothing else. If forced to work for his living, there was every chance of his making as little way as had his father. But then Justinian was young, and not completely formed; there might be entertained hope for such, and Theresa did not spend much thought on him.

It was otherwise with the memory of the testator. Was she to reveal him to the world in an ugly light? Was it not her duty as his widow to be careful of his reputation, to save him from becoming the topic of conversation in every house between Liskeard and Launceston? What sort of comment would be

passed on him? What could men and women say of the man who had so lightly deserted one wife, and without taking proper pains to ascertain whether she were alive or dead, had married another, and that the daughter of the most highly respected clergyman in the district? What could be said of the man who left the hateful secret to be disclosed after his death, because he was too great a coward to face the consequences of its being known whilst he was alive?

Theresa had little doubt in her mind that Lambert had committed suicide. No one else thought so save Physic. But were the truth to be known about his relations to her and Jane, every one would conclude that he had shot himself to escape exposure. He had shot himself. His punishment had fallen on him. Theresa could enter into his mind and weigh the agony of remorse, the doubt, the desperation that tore him, when he ran into the bungalow, took down the pistol, loaded it, and applied the muzzle to his head. He had suffered the penalty of his acts. Let that suffice. Let his memory remain unsullied by any act of hers. Let her stand between him and the revelation that would blast his name.

And, lastly, she thought of herself.

A qualm came over her. She had striven to obtain her livelihood, and had met with as little success as Percival, who had lounged. She had become over-wearied with the incessant

strain, never pretermitted for a day, the strain to hold her own, to maintain her proper level, and not to sink exhausted on the ground, lay her head in the dust, and let the heart out of utter weariness cease to perform its function. At length, in ripe years, she had been able to seat herself and look forward to rest.

There was a picture that she knew well, and understood as perhaps did few others. It is in Doré's *Wandering Jew.* The unfortunate cobbler was doomed to walk till the Last Day Century after century passes, and night and day the weary man trudges on. Others may sit down, but not he. Others may lay their heads on pillows and fall into dead sleep, but not he. The shoes wear out and re-form on his blistered feet. His muscles are knotted with cramp from over-strain, but may not be relaxed. His eyes are as lead in their sockets, but may not be closed. Then he hears the blast of the trumpet of the Archangel, and at once he sits down and proceeds to kick off his shoes. This is what the artist represents. He has seen into the heart of the utterly fagged-out man. His first, nay, his only thought, at the peal of the trumpet is to sit and be rid of his boots. And Theresa had been on the trudge for nineteen years, and was wearied to the death by it. She had found at length a seat and rest, but only for a moment; the harsh voice of Physic had bidden her tramp on. But not for ever; surely there remained

but one struggle more, one on which she had never reckoned, and after that she would have nothing more to fear.

She must find three hundred pounds at once; and she had nothing of her own. In his wonted careless manner Percival had made no settlement on her at his marriage, he had neither promised her anything of her own whilst under coverture, nor assured her anything after his death. He had put his hand into his pocket, or had drawn a cheque when she had desired to buy anything; but that very morning in church Theresa had felt the awkwardness of having no purse and allowance of her own, for there had been a collection on behalf of some charity, and she had had no money to put into the plate.

She would have to obtain the three hundred pounds from Percival without being able to tell him for what she required the sum. She shrank from asking this; she was uncertain how he would take it; she feared lest it should occasion a difference, lest he should refuse her the money, or lest he should give it with reluctance and suspicion. It was a large sum to require without her being able to explain her need for it.

As she mused, her finger unconsciously traced the letters engraved in the slate of the tombstone on which she was seated. She now looked at the inscription. It ran:

Inveni portum ; spes et Fortuna valete ;
Nil mihi vobiscum ; ludite nunc alios.

She was a sufficient scholar to make out the sense. What! was the grave the only harbour of refuge for the storm-tossed? Were hope and fortune making their sport of her for a brief period, then to desert her?

She put her hand to her brow, that was throbbing as if it would burst. Then Percival, who had approached unobserved, unheard, over the turf of the churchyard, said: 'My dear, why have you not come to lunch? By Jove! it is new to me to say "lunch." I have been accustomed to dine at one o'clock, and have cold something and cheese in the evening for supper. Bathsheba's supreme effort was always for the midday meal.'

'I did not consider I should be wanted,' said Theresa.

'My dear, you are always in request when not present—not by me only. Justinian has been calling out for you. Are you not very well?'

'No, Percy, not that, but worried.'

'Gracious! what have you to worry you?'

'The usual worry. What troubled you in old days.'

'I was always short of money,' answered Percival readily. 'But that can't fret you now.'

'It does; I have nothing. There was a collection in

the church this morning, and I had not a penny in my pocket.'

'Why did you not ask me before?'

'I did not know there would be a collection.'

'It doesn't matter. I'll send five bob to the old pomposity. What was it for?'

'I—I really do not recollect.'

'It does not matter. I'll send the five bob.'

'Yes, Percy, but that does not satisfy me. It is very awkward for me to be without cash.'

'What do you want, T.?'

Percival Curgenven put his hand into his pocket and pulled out a handful of copper and silver.

'I say, I have no gold here. But I can make up a sovereign in silver. And that will be all the better, T., because then you will have plenty of small change.'

'Thank you, Percival, but that does not exactly meet my requirements.' She rose from the tomb and laid her hand on his arm. 'I want more than that. It seems mean of me to ask it. I owe you everything, dear; you have been so good to me.'

'Oh, stuff! it is I who am laid under obligation.'

'Well, there are circumstances that oblige me to ask you to make me an allowance. May I ask you to give me a certain sum, to deal with just as I like, to spend or to hoard as

suits my fancy; to go to when I want something very much, without having to come with the bill to you?'

'Certainly. But don't bother about that now.'

'Yes, Percy, I must. You see I may need money at any moment. To-morrow is Monday. Might I have my allowance to-morrow in a cheque?'

'Certainly you shall. Come along to feed. There is some very nice lobster salad, uncommonly well made. Our new cook is a first-rater.'

'Then I may have the cheque to-morrow?'

'Yes, T.; for how much? I dare say I could get you some gold by scraping about, if you want ready money.'

'I should like——' Then her heart failed her, and with her heart her powers. She sank back on the tombstone. The sum was so great. She was sick at heart.

'My dear husband,' she said in a timid voice, 'do you recall what I said when you proposed to me? I said then that it was possible, situated as I was, that certain persons might turn up and assert claims on me——'

'What, some relations have manifested themselves? Where are they? Ask them to lunch. Leave all that to me.'

'I cannot, Percy. I warned you then, but I did not then think it could happen, but what I feared has come about, though in a most unforeseen manner. I must have three

hundred pounds to satisfy some one who otherwise could cause both of us great annoyance.'

'He has begun at once, upon my word he has! But don't let these fellows bother you. Pass them on to me. I'll satisfy them with my walking-stick.'

'No, no, Percy. This is a real claim. I cannot explain its nature to you. I cannot tell you any particulars about the person who makes the demand. All I can say is that, unless I find the money, I shall be put to great unhappiness that may be permanent.'

'You shall have the money; but it is a large sum.'

'And then you will not inquire what becomes of it.'

Percival was evidently uneasy.

'Is this the first and last demand?'

'It is the first; I hope, I do hope it will go no further.'

'I'll make it four hundred,' said her husband; 'at any rate for this year; then there is a hundred for yourself over. But, T., don't let this be tried again, or I shall have to interfere. There is no satisfying bloodsuckers. Is it some one who pretends cousinship?'

'I said I could tell you nothing.'

'All serene. I won't ask. But, I say, T., I hope the lobster salad will be as good when we get to it as it was when I started after you.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

CIVILIZATION AND SAVAGERY.

After this scene in the churchyard, Theresa was aware of a slight diminution in cordiality in her husband. He was probably unconscious of it himself, but the freshness, the frankness of confidence between him and his wife were gone. He endeavoured to be cheery and amiable as usual, but there was evident to her eye an effort on his part to seem as he had been. A jar in the perfect harmony that had reigned between them had taken place, a drop of bitterness had fallen into the cup out of which both drank. A little germ of suspicion had entered into his heart, there to ferment. A tendency to decline was noticeable in the barometer that marked even weather. Theresa was alive to this, and unhappy. A fire burnt in her heart, a fire of resentment against Physic, who was the occasion. He had come to mar her happiness, which had otherwise been complete. She might have been

content, had she felt confident that the three hundred pounds she had obtained for him were sure to suffice, and that he would no further press for money, but her fear was that this was but the beginning of a series of exactions, and that the result would be estrangement between her husband and herself. Percival would reasonably ask for whom and for what purpose these demands were made, and if she refused to tell him, and refuse she must, he would be filled with vague and disquieting suspicions that would destroy confidence between them, and seriously jeopardize the continuance of his affection.

And the man who was bringing this blight on her life was Physic. Her bosom heaved, her heart swelled. She clenched her hands. She hated him. She had been walking through the grounds, now she opened the wicket-gate and went out on the moor, and was suddenly aware of a girl who was dodging among the trees and behind the hedges.

Theresa halted in her walk and watched the girl, who, when she saw she was observed, came from her hiding and sauntered along the down, then stopped and turned to see whether Theresa were still looking at her. When she was aware that she continued to engage attention, she turned abruptly and came towards her.

Theresa was struck by the easy grace of the girl, by the elasticity of her tread, the flexibility of her upright body, and

the beauty of her flowing red-gold hair. There was a sullen, peevish expression in her handsome face. She stepped up to Theresa and said: 'Why do you look at me? What do you want? Are you his new mother?'

Theresa smiled: 'I think I have heard of you. My husband, Mr. Curgenven, has mentioned your name. You are Esther Morideg.'

'Yes, I be. Is there any hurt in that?'

'None at all. I was very sorry to hear that you had been turned out of your cottage by Mr. Physic. Have you found a new home?'

'No. We are in a linney, a bit.'

'I will come and see you some day, and perhaps I may be able to take your grandmother something that will help to make her comfortable.'

'Oh, gran'fer and gran'mother don't want nothing but to be let alone. Us was well enough till Physic came and turned out we. I say, be you the squire's new wife?'

'Yes, I am Mrs. Curgenven.'

'I say, where is the young squire? Why ha'n't he been nigh us? I want to see 'n, I do, cruel bad.'

'What for? Is there anything I can do for you?'

'You? No.'

'Then why do you want him?'

The girl looked irresolutely at her, then dropped her eyes. She caught her skirt and played with it, plucking with both hands and shuffling with her feet in the short grass.

'I do want to see 'n, I do.'

'For what reason?'

The girl stamped impatiently. 'I ain't got no reasons. I ha'n't see 'n for four days—there—wi'n't that do? I reckon he's been to the pass'nage, he has; he've been wi' Miss Alice, sure enough.' She raised her head, her cheeks were on fire. 'Well, I reckon and so he ort, but for all I want to see 'n cruel bad, I do; so there now!'

'Esther,' said Theresa, 'would you like to come with me and see Curgenven house and gardens? I will show them to you.'

'Yes, I would. That other, the ou'd squiress, her turned me out; her wouldn't let me have tea wi' the childer, nor see nort. Her were a hard 'un.'

'Then come with me, Esther; I will show you everything.'

'Is he at home?'

'If you mean Mr. Justinian,' said Theresa, becoming more grave, 'he is not.'

The girl hesitated, but finally resolved to accept the offer. 'Come along then,' she said, with a swing of her body in the direction of the house.

The thoughts of Theresa were for awhile diverted from her own troubles. This wild moor-girl interested her. She also was a victim to Physic's unscrupulousness. As these two walked side by side, Theresa knew that she was herself menaced by that man with the like treatment that had been administered to Esther. One had been driven out of her home, the other was threatened with expulsion. The thought of this drew Theresa to her strange associate. But another consideration urged her to make Esther's acquaintance. Percival had told her how he had come upon Justinian with the girl at the cross on the moor-edge, and of his own uneasiness on that head.

Theresa and Esther were both waifs out of the evenly flowing stream of common social life. Neither had much to boast of in parentage. Both suffered from not belonging to the great bulk of settled humanity that knows all about itself and its belongings on all sides, that has grown on one spot, and has come to share the opinions and prejudices and likings of surrounding humanity, as insects and birds take the colours of the foliage in the midst of which they dwell. Esther in her own sphere was as much shunned and despised as Theresa knew she would be in the sphere into which she had been taken up. She felt a pity for the girl, and kindly interest in her, and Theresa looked at Esther's face with curiosity as she walked at her side.

It was a handsome face, with boldly cut features, a broad forehead, with fine hazel eyes under the arched brows; the mouth was singularly delicate and the chin fine for one in her class of life. The face was one of generous impulse; of strength and weakness in equal combination, of defiance and fear, of rudeness and refinement.

'I say,' the girl turned on Theresa, 'do'y like him now?'

'Whom? Mr. Justinian? Indeed I do. I like him very much.'

'There now,' said Esther, with light flashing in her face, 'I be main glad o' that. You don't seem such a bad 'un. I reckon he were a little out about his father for marrying you. But I told 'n he couldn't ha' everything he liked. I reckon he likes you now he's come to know you?'

'Yes, I think so.'

'There, I be glad o' that.' She took Theresa's hand in hers and patted it with the other. 'He and Miss Alice be my best friends; and I reckon, if you behave yourself, you shall be another. I likes your face, I do.'

'Thank you, Esther,' said Theresa with a smile. 'Here we are at the house. Come in.'

'No; there now, I be 'most ashamed.' The girl hung back. 'It be so terrible fine.'

'There is no one to alarm you. You and I can go through

the rooms together. We shall find no one there ; Mr. Curgenven and Master Justinian have gone out shooting together.'

The girl looked at the house with mistrust. She wished to see the interior, and yet was shy of entering. She was conscious of the incongruity of her own appearance in rough homespun with the refinement and beauty of the interior.

When she entered the hall she kicked off her shoes, afraid to walk in them on the polished oak floor. She put her hands behind her back, and looked at the walls hung with family portraits, and at the flowers on a stand in the middle.

'Who be all they?' she asked, with her eyes on the pictures.

'Those are Curgenvens for two hundred years and more, fathers and grandfathers, back and back, when the dress was very different from what it is now.'

'I never knowed who my father was,' said Esther.

'Nor do I who was mine,' said Theresa.

'Now, you don't say so!' The girl drew to the side of Mrs. Curgenven.

Theresa led Esther into the dining-room, where the table was spread with white linen, and glittered with glass and silver. The girl looked steadily at the table for a while, then went to it and took up a dessert spoon. 'I reckon this be silver,' she said. 'Why, what a lot of shillings be in her!'

'Yes ; I dare say ten or twelve.'

'What do you have 'em about for? B'an't y' afeard folks 'll steal 'em?'

'Oh no, not here.'

'I would hide 'em up the chimley, under the drexil' (threshold). 'Don't y' now let ou'd Physic see 'em, or he'd never let y' be easy till he'd gotten them all. He's as great a thief, for certain sure, as any o' them chaps as be shut up in Bodmin gaol.'

'Would you like anything to eat, Esther? I can order you something directly.'

'No, thanky', I couldn't eat here, I'd not know how to do it wi' all these grand things about. I couldn't tell what I had i' my mouth when my eyes was so full of strange sights.'

'Then come with me and you shall see the drawing-room.'

'And what be that for? Sure you've more rooms than you can want. Why should you not sit and talk and do what you've a mind to do here after you've done eating? I can't see why you mun ha' a different chamber for everything you do—one to read in, one to talk in, one to eat in, and one to play in. I grant y' its reasonable to have one to sleep in as is not the same. But all the rest is waste and nonsense. Ay! and you must have a house for smoking 'baccy in too—the bungalow. 'Tis foolishness. I'm glad I'm not Jan

Jeaks' (snail), 'to hev to carry such a house as this on my back. I don't know as it's much to make one happy to have a house. I've not got one; some Physic may come and turn you out. If you've none, why you're free as the air, and nobody can't take nothing from you, like the horniwinks' (plovers).

'How would you like to live in such a house as this?'

'I could not live in it; I should die. It's all very well to look at now and again, but to live in—bless you, I couldn't do it!'

Theresa took the girl into other parts of the house, and then said to her: 'Now, what more would you like?'

'Looky' here now!' said Esther, and drew open her throat, displaying her coral necklace. 'Have you aught like that?'

'I will show you my jewellery—yet not mine—the family jewels. When I am dead they will go to the wife of Justinian.'

She led the girl up the stately Queen Anne staircase, with full-length portraits on it of Curgenvens in powder and wigs, in blue velvet and crimson velvet, of the ladies of the house with their hair low over their eyes, in shot satins, with pearls about their long necks, and dogs at their sides.

'These,' said Theresa, turning on a landing, 'these are the

wives of the Curgenvens, grand and beautiful ladies who never let the sun look on their faces unveiled.'

She conducted Esther to her bedroom, opened a cabinet and produced a jewel-case, unlocked it, and let the evening sun glitter on the diamonds.

The girl took up a necklet, and in speechless admiration let it twinkle about her fingers. Then she was shown another of sapphires; rings and bracelets, and brooches and tiaras. Theresa removed her hat and put on some of the jewellery, that the girl might understand how it was worn.

Then suddenly Esther put her hand to her own coral necklace and tore the string so that the coral grains fell about the floor. 'It's just naught at all,' she said.

Theresa knelt and began to collect the strewn members of the necklace. 'You are wrong—altogether wrong,' said she. 'Esther, this coral looks charming on your pretty neck; it suits you admirably. But these diamonds and pearls would make you ridiculous. You could not wear them.'

'No; I'd be a dressed-up monkey,' said the girl.

'These will go to Justinian's wife, and will suit beautifully her delicate skin and her refined beauty.' As Theresa spoke, she felt over the floor for more pieces of coral. 'She will be a lady like those you saw on the stairs. Some of these jewels were worn by them, and suited them, as you could see in the

paintings. Justinian's wife will be painted some day in the same style, and hung with the others. I dare say she will be quite as noble and lovely a lady as any of them. She will be very happy in this grand house, and will know exactly what to do in it—in each of the rooms; know all as a matter of course, because she was bred to it. And she will play the piano and make sweet music——'

'Why are you saying all this?' asked Esther uneasily.

'Esther, my dear,' continued Theresa, without noticing her interruption, 'it would be dreadful to Justinian to lose all this, to be poor, to have to live in a linney, to eat without silver forks, and lie in fern and heather, and not have servants to wait on him. It would be as strange to him, such a life as yours, as it would be strange to you to live such a life as his.'

'I reckon it would.'

The girl was turning a pearl necklace about her brown bare arm.

'See!' she said; 'don't this look comical?'

'It does. But are you attending to what I say?'

Esther laid the string of pearls aside in the case. 'There,' she said, 'lock it all up again. I've seen enough of them. I don't want to see them no more.'

'I will do so, and put them aside for Justinian's wife, as I am not likely to wear them. I was not born to such a place

as this, and so I cannot wear them. Now, Esther, tell me the truth. Why were you hiding among the trees when I came through the park? For whom were you looking? On whom waiting?'

The girl hung her head and turned it aside.

'You need not answer me,' said Theresa; 'I know. You were hoping to meet Justinian.'

'If I were, there's no harm in that;' with a toss of the hair and a slight tone of defiance.

'It will not do, dear Esther; indeed it will not. You never can properly be Justinian's companion. How can you, when he lives in such a house as this, and you, as you say, in an old stable?'

The girl put up her arms and dropped her face between them.

'It is this that I wished to say to you,' pursued Theresa, 'that you two can be friends only at a distance. You see now that it is not possible for you to be his wife. You never could shape yourself to live in this place. On the other hand, you could not drag him away to your wretched hovel. He would be infinitely miserable there. And, Esther, you can be a friend to the young squire only at a long distance. Do you understand? I speak seriously. There is one thing to a woman above everything precious, her honour. Treasure that, dear

child. Never risk that. Lose that, and though the noblest in the land you are vile as dirt. Preserve it, and you hold up your head as high as a princess. I am anxious for you, I am anxious for him. He is generous; he is careless. You are generous and inconsiderate——'

The girl threw herself passionately on the floor as she would have done on her native heath, and still burying her face in her arms, and turning it to the carpet, sobbed: 'I love him, I do; I does!'

CHAPTER XIX.

TRYING THE PISTOL.

THERESA had been speaking, whilst engaged in collecting the coral beads, kneeling on the carpet. When she saw the girl fling herself down, she went to her, on her knees, and seated herself beside her. The corals she had collected were in one palm. She laid the other hand on the ruddy golden head that was rocking and tossing, and gently stroked it.

'Esther, my dear, you must be reasonable. You love the sun, but if you climbed into heaven to it, you would be burnt in its fire. You love the moon, but if you were to drag it down to your little hut, its rays would be quenched, it would turn black as a cinder in your hands. You know that you never, never, never can be Justinian's wife.'

The girl, speaking into the pile of the carpet through her fingers, said, 'I know that. Didn't I join their hands in the Tolmaen?'

'I do not understand you, Esther.'

'Didn't I take him and make him hold Miss Alice's hand through the holed stone? and that's a surer marriage than any parson can bind. I did it—I—and what I did I cannot undo.'

'I do not understand about that,' said Theresa, raising her hand for a moment from the girl's head, that had ceased its rocking motion under the gentle pressure. 'I know nothing about this holed stone, my dear, but of this I am very sure, that you and Justinian are too wide apart ever with honour, and without shame and misery, to be nearer each other than you are now. So try to be a sensible girl, and conquer this feeling in your heart that can only make you wretched, and which, if not driven away, may be the occasion of such disgrace to Justinian as will destroy his prospects in life.'

'She at the "Cornish Chough" said that.' Esther raised her head and turned it.

'And she, whoever she was, said what is true. Will you listen patiently to me, child?'

'Yes, I'll try.'

Esther lifted herself on one arm, and turned to Theresa.

'Why did you take your hand off me? Are you angry?'

'No, indeed I am not.'

The evening light, shining through the window that com-

manded the western sky, fell over the girl. The whole sky was in flame above the set sun, and in the flame were bars of cloud as pure gold gleaming with intense brilliancy. The amber glare from the sky pouring in at the window suffused the girl on the floor. In her tossing, her hair had become untied; it fell in a shining flood over her shoulder, and the arm that stayed her up.

Theresa put out her hand and drew the young head to her, and laid it on her lap.

'There, my dear, will that please you? How hot your head is!'

'Go on,' said Esther, 'say what you will.'

'I have not much to say,' continued Theresa, 'but what I say I am sure, if you have—and I know you have it—an honest and true heart—I am sure you say to yourself in your own heart. You love Justinian, and he likes you after a fashion. So do I, I like you, I like you very much. So does Alice, so must all who come to know you.'

'You are wrong—folks hate me.'

'Surely not hate you.'

'They don't like me. No mothers 'll let their children come with me. No maids 'll ever play wi' me. I've no friends.'

'They do not understand you. You are a little wild for

them. But that is not what I am speaking about. What I was about to say was this, did you ever hear the story of the man who married a cat?'

'A cat! No.'

'He had a beautiful tabby, and she was a capital mouser. She was such a beautiful puss, with such white soft fur on her paws, and purred so sweetly, that the man asked Juno to turn her into a woman.'

'Who's Juno?'

'Well, we will say a wise woman.'

'Go on. Did she do it?'

'Yes.'

'I know,' said Esther musingly, 'that wise women theirselves turn o' night-times when they likes into hares. There was one out Altarnun way. Her went about all over the country to night-times, after dimmets' (twilight). 'But one night her got caught i' Squire Rodd's trap—set by the keeper. And next morning what did he find in his trap but a woman's hand! And he went round axing what she-folks was ill. And when he came to Genefer Carndue's cottage, her ou'd man —silly fool—let out as her were i' bed wi' a bad arm. Then the keeper he forced his way up-stair, and found the ou'd woman i' bed, and he pu'd down the clothes, and sure enough, her had lost a hand.'

'You are interrupting my story.'

'Sure and sartain I was. There, go on, and put your hand over my lips to make me hou'd my tongue.'

'Well, Esther, so this wise woman, Juno, she did what she was asked. She turned the cat into a beautiful young wife. The man was very pleased, and he had the table spread for a great wedding feast, and he invited all his friends to it, to see what a lovely wife he had. Well, they came and made merry, and praised her very highly. All went on very well till a mouse ran through the room. Then up sprang the lady, and the table-cloth caught in her dress, and she jumped away and ran after the mouse, pulling the table-cloth and all the glasses and plates, and dishes and bottles, and pies and cakes, off the table in a smash and confusion on the floor. But she did not care; she had caught and was eating the mouse.'

'Oh, jimmery-chry!' Esther burst out laughing; then slowly rose to her knees and stood up.

'Yes,' she said, 'I reckon it's a right sort o' a tale for me, and I knows it is so. There, gi'e me my corals, I'll string them again, and I promise you I'll put the thoughts of him out o' my heart as much as I can. I've been silly, I know. I wouldn't go after a mouse—no! But if I were at a great feast, with grand silver and goold plates, and knives and forks, and glass and gran' folks, ladies and gentles, like as there in

them picturs on the stairs, and talkin' about I don't know what, and if I was to hear a horniwink' (plover) 'whistle outside o' the winder, I'd up—I know—just like that lady, and away I'd go out o' the winder and away after the horniwink, and to the moors and over Trewortha—and never come back there no more.'

'That is a brave and good girl. I thought you would do what is right, and I am not deceived.'

Esther turned sharply and looked with brightened face into Theresa's eyes and smiled, two deep dimples forming at the corners of her mouth. Then she caught up Theresa's hand and kissed it passionately.

'Now,' said she, 'show me the bungalow, as they ca' it, wi' all them queer things inside as I've heard tell on, that the captain made.'

'I will cheerfully show you what is there. But some of the contrivances no longer work, or I do not understand how to wind them up, and some have been removed.'

The girl fastened up her hair, and followed her guide down the great staircase. On the landing they passed a maid-servant, who looked with surprise and disgust at the half-savage girl, the grand-daughter of the white-witch, and she stood well back against the wall, not so much out of deference to her mistress as to avoid the touch of the coarse clothes of

Esther as she brushed by. In the hall was the footman, and he also stood aside and stared at the girl with insolence and disdain. What right had she, from off the moors, to be in the house? What could Mrs. Curgenven mean by letting her in, by taking her up-stairs? There were queer tales about the mistress—that she'd been a sort of a governess, or goodness knew what. John Thomas could believe anything of her, now that she so far forgot herself as to associate with, and bring up the great staircase, such a creature as Esther Morideg. Birds of a feather fly together. You may know a person by the company he or she keeps. Lor! what be the world a-coming to? John Thomas was expected to go up and down the back-stairs, and if the back-stairs was good enough for him, it was a great deal too good for wild creatures off the moor.

Esther was quite conscious of the impression she wrought on the two servants, and she breathed freer when she was outside the house. Theresa turned back to speak to the footman, and require refreshments to be brought into the bungalow, where she considered Esther would be more disposed to eat than in the house.

In the bungalow, Theresa amused the girl with what pieces of mechanism could be got to act, and then brought her into the smoking-room, whither she had ordered a tray with rabbit-pie, tart, and some cider to be brought.

Here she seated herself, and allowed Esther to look at the weapons on the wall, the whips, spurs, fishing-rods, and spoils of the chase.

'Can you shoot?' asked the girl, turning to Theresa, who shook her head with a smile in response.

'But I can,' said Esther. 'My gran'fer he's brave wi' his gun, and I reckon I can bring down a woodcock as well as he. But thickey little things—they be pisterns' (pistols), 'I s'pose. I never shot wi' such as they.'

She took down a pistol, cocked it, and let down the hammer cautiously. She then took the ramrod—it was an old-fashioned pistol, not a breechloader—and tried whether the instrument was loaded. Satisfied that it was not, she turned again to Theresa, and in a coaxing tone said, 'Now do'y then let me have a shot wi' she and try what her be like.'

'So long as you do no mischief, I do not object.'

'Where be the bullets?' asked the girl. She had found the gunpowder case and run a charge into the barrel.

Theresa opened a drawer, where were bullets, and wads, and caps; also in compartments the cartridges of various sizes for breechloaders.

The girl at once fitted a bullet and put on a cap. Then she threw open the window.

'Now, what shall I have a shot at?' she asked, looking out

into the park. 'Hish! For sartain there be a hoodwall' (woodpecker) 'running up thickey oak tree. Do'y see 'n? Yonder. I wonder if I can hit 'n.'

The girl raised the pistol and fired.

The bird flew away.

'I missed 'n,' said Esther. 'There, now, if it had been gran'fer's ou'd gun I'd not ha' done that. Or, by golly! if it had been Lawyer Physic standin' there, I dare take my oath I'd ha' shot 'n.'

In the door, aghast, stood the footman with the tray.

Theresa made a sign to him to place the tray on the table by the window.

'Now, Esther, here is something better for you to do than to shoot hoodwalls.'

'I did'n shoot 'n,' said the girl; 'for one, I pitied the poor bird; for the other, I did'n understand a little pistern.'

She was loading again.

'There,' said she, 'now you try. Have a shot and see if you can do better nor me.'

'No, thank you, Esther. I am quite sure I would fail more completely than yourself. Come now, sit and eat and drink.'

'When you're by yourself,' said the girl, 'try; in a time or two it will come. It would wi' me if I had thickey pistern to practise wi'. There, I'll put 'n back i' her place. Mind now,

her's loaden. You can amuse yourself wi' she when you like, and mebbe make a better shot nor I. Or,' she took down the pistol again, 'might I have a shot at the footman there?'

The man fled out of the smoking-room, ran back to the house and to the servants' hall, as fast as his stockinged legs could carry him.

END OF VOL. II.